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**Living in the shade of others: intermediation, politics and violence in Dhaka city**

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# **Living in the shade of others: intermediation, politics and violence in Dhaka city**

David Jackman

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
University of Bath  
Department of Social and Policy Sciences

March 2017

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## CONVENTIONS

Direct quotes from research participants are written in italics, but without quotation marks. Where a quote is in italics with double quotation marks, it indicates that an English term was used in Bengali by the research participant. Quotes from secondary sources are written with single quotation marks when in the body of the text, while larger quotes are separated and indented without quotation marks. Important Bengali terms are transliterated into English, italicised, and their meanings defined when first used. Where a particular Bengali expression has been used that is deemed important, the transliterated Bengali is also provided in italics. Both quotes from research participants and cited texts are italicised when at the beginning of sections.

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## GLOSSARY

### Bengali

*Amrao Manush*  
*Arot*  
*Arotdar*  
*Bhashoman*  
*Bhangari dokan*  
*Bhasha*  
*Bhagabond*  
*Bhikkuk*  
*Boro bhai*  
*Bosti*  
*Bosti-bashi*  
*Cashier*  
*Chamcha*  
*Chanda*  
*Chhapra*  
*Chinomul*  
*Committee*  
*Coolie*  
*Dalal*  
*Dal*  
*Fakir/Fakini*  
*Former*  
*Gaza*  
*Godfather*  
*Goonda*  
*Hartal*  
*Jupri*  
*Kangal*  
*Kangali*  
*Karwan Bazar*  
*Keu nai*  
*Kichu nai*  
*Lakh*  
*Line*  
*Lineman*  
*Lungi*  
*Malik*  
*Mastan*  
*Matbar/matabbor*  
*Mazar*  
*Minti*  
*Missil*  
*Mumla*  
*OC*  
*Oshahi*  
*Party*

### English

We are also people  
 Wholesale shop (or large retail shop)  
 Wholesaler  
 Floating person  
 Recycled goods shop  
 To float  
 Vagabond  
 Beggar  
 Big brother  
 Slum  
 Slum dweller  
 Treasurer  
 Political follower, “yes man”  
 Toll, illegal tax, extortion money  
 Shed, shack  
 Rootless person  
 Panel managing *samiti*  
 Coolie, porter, labourer  
 Middleman  
 Group, party, faction  
 Beggar (male/female)  
 Informer  
 Marijuana  
 Godfather, mafia leader, gang leader  
 Hired fighter, violent criminal, gangster  
 National strike  
 Shed, shack  
 Need  
 Someone in need, destitute  
 Large market place in central Dhaka  
 To have no-one  
 To have nothing  
 A hundred thousand  
 Field or line (of work)  
 Middleman collecting *chanda*  
 Sarong  
 Owner  
 Gangster, godfather, criminal  
 Village leader  
 Islamic religious shrine  
 Porter, labourer  
 Political meeting  
 Police case  
 Officer in charge (of a police station)  
 Helpless  
 Political party



<i>Politics</i>	Politics
<i>Potho-bashi</i>	Street dweller
<i>Potho-bosti</i>	Street slum
<i>Rasta</i>	Road
<i>Rastar manush</i>	A street person
<i>Razneti</i>	Party politics
<i>Samaj</i>	Society
<i>Shalish</i>	Dispute resolution system
<i>Shongothon</i>	Association
<i>Shontrashi, shontrash</i>	Criminal, gangster, terrorist
<i>Sardar</i>	Labour leader, area leader
<i>Samiti</i>	Association, savings group
<i>Thana</i>	Administrative sub-unit, police station
<i>Tokai</i>	Scavenger, ragpicker
<i>Top terror</i>	Terrorist, gangster, big criminal

## ACRONYMS

ASCA	Accumulating Savings and Credit Association
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BRAC	Building Resources Across Communities
BIGD	BRAC Institute for Governance and Development
CNG	Compressed Natural Gas
CSD	Central Storage Depots
CUP	Coalition for the Urban Poor
DCC	Dhaka City Corporation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IGS	Institute of Governance Studies
KG	Kilogram
LAO	Limited Access Order
MFI	Microfinance Institutions
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OAo	Open Access Order
OC	Officer in Charge
RAB	Rapid Action Battalion
RCLI	Royal Commission on Labour in India
RIR	Responses to Information Requests
ROSCA	Rotating Savings and Credit Association
SDI	Slum/Shack Dwellers International
SEEP	The Social and Economic Enhancement Programme
UK	United Kingdom
WASA	Water Supply and Sewerage Authority

## ABSTRACT

Bangladesh is often perceived as disordered, characterised by the absence of law abiding systems of governance, and with the poor left to rely on corrupt and dysfunctional relationships. This thesis tells a different story. Examining the lives of people living in the open and most basic slums ethnographically in Dhaka city reveals that people have complex dependencies on ‘intermediaries’ or ‘brokers’ to access resources. Rather than see these relationships as dysfunctional, the core argument developed is that they are inherently part of how social order is maintained in Bangladeshi society. If order is understood as contingent on actors throughout society establishing a dominant capability for violence and accruing resources on this basis, then intermediation can be seen as a prominent means by which both of these ends are achieved. These relationships are thus intertwined with how violence is organised and controlled. A young man who grew up at a bazar described how people need to live in the shade of others, and this metaphor is used to portray this phenomenon. This thesis argues that intermediation in Dhaka has changed significantly over the past decade, with the *mastan* gangs once identified as powerful in radical decline, replaced by wings of the ruling political party. At the lowest levels of urban society, a complex web of intermediaries exists, including labour leaders, political leaders, their followers and informers. Some people attempt to rise in this order by mobilising as factions and demonstrating their capability for violence, but more generally people employ tactics and strategies for avoiding, negotiating and even exiting these relationships. Negotiating these relationships and one’s place in this order is conceptualised here as the politics of intermediation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

At the age of around ten, a young boy called Golap came alone to Dhaka from a village in Bhola district, at the very south of Bangladesh, where he had lived with his father, stepmother and two younger siblings. His father had worked away from the village as a night coach driver, only coming back one or two days a month, and did not seem to care for him (*he didn't listen to my news*, as Golap put it). Meanwhile his stepmother had abused him and prevented him from going to school. And so he decided to run away, taking a launch to Dhaka and coming to Karwan Bazar – a large wholesale market at the centre of the city - where he knew he had a cousin working in the fish market. Golap stayed with his cousin and for the first couple of years they slept when they could on the large planks of timber in a shop to the south of the bazar, and he survived by stealing vegetables at night, then buying rice and cooking for himself. As goods pour in to the bazar from the country's districts by truck, they are moved onto smaller rickshaw vans to find their way to the appropriate wholesaler. For years Golap and a couple of other young boys at the cusp of their teenage years would work their way around the bazar every night, sometimes cutting small holes in the sacks on the backs of the rickshaws as they moved or picking off vegetables from shops, and making off with as much as they could.

In the early hours of the morning they then used to crouch down at the side of the paths at the bazar and sell the vegetables in small ten *taka*<sup>1</sup> piles, before giving a share of their profit to a *boro bhai* (big brother) who used to protect them if a shop owner or the police caught them. Their *boro bhai* was a drug dealer operating from a nearby *bosti* (slum) along the railway line. If they made 500 *taka* in a night, they would give him 200 *taka*. Despite his support the work was still risky, and Golap was beaten up on a number of occasions. After a couple of years he got the opportunity to fill in for someone as a street newspaper seller, and around this time he was also taken in by a local NGO for boys, and allowed to shower at their centre as well as sleep there during the day. After a short stint selling newspapers he got work on a bus through a friend. At first he was a “*helper*”, responsible for rounding up customers, alerting people by banging the side of the bus; then he became a “*conductor*”, responsible for taking people's fares and managing passengers; and for the past six months now aged around eighteen, a “*driver*”, though he earns less because he is yet to have a driving license.

Golap works the Uttara – Gulistan route, from the North to the South of the city, three days a week and in 23 hour shifts, starting at 4am and finishing at 3am the following day. He described to me his relationship with a political leader who was a member of

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<sup>1</sup> 100 *taka* is around 1 British pound, and worth much more in real terms.

the *Sramik League*<sup>2</sup>, using the notion of being under someone, as in dependent upon them:

*I stay under him, I drive a bus under him, I eat under him, everything is under him... If the police or administration catches me then he will set me free... You need the shade of a guardian [guardianer chaya lage]*

This thesis examines how people live in the shade of others, a metaphor for the dependencies that people need to maintain on more powerful actors to pursue their livelihoods and interests. In contexts of poverty and inequality such relationships are a relatively familiar object of study within the social sciences, and can be seen in a rich history of work from at least the early 20<sup>th</sup> century within anthropology, sociology and more recently development studies. The precise subjects of interest and concepts through which these relationships have been examined have differed in line with both the dominant forms of social organisation in any given context, and the fashions and concerns of the period. To name only a few concepts this includes: kinship, class, clientelism, power, gender, caste, brokerage and patronage. The focus of this thesis is therefore a familiar one, but approached with new theoretical tools, and in a context to date largely unexamined.

It is common to see much in the account of Golap's life in Dhaka as portraying a broken, disorderly society, riven by corruption and crime. Stealing vegetables, being protected by a drug dealer, being an unlicensed bus driver, requiring the protection of a political leader; all of these descriptions seem to indicate a profound dysfunction. Indeed, analyses of how and why such hierarchical relationships and livelihoods exist are often based on, or lead to, similar characterisations. But in so doing they betray an assumption about what such societies should be like, and that explanations can be built by analysing societies against this model. In other words, they frame the dynamics observed not in terms of their logics and the wider purposes they serve, but instead normatively, in terms of their distance from an abstract notion of how a state should be. A number of authors have argued that this normative model is Liberal and Weberian in form, characterised by impersonal rights based on the rule of law with the central state holding a monopoly on the use of violence (North et al 2009; Khan 2013; Wood et al 2017). Explaining Golap's life against this model results in explanations that emphasise a deficiency or an aberration; characterisations of being 'dysfunctional', 'disordered' or 'corrupt', by contrast with that which is functional, ordered, or law abiding.

That these models should be held in such high regard can be questioned normatively, and the analytical risk this assumption brings is that it draws attention in the wrong direction; with social structures and dynamics understood in ways that obscure the logics and meanings they have in the contexts in which they take place. Arguably much development practice is premised on this mistake (North et al. 2015). Recent

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<sup>2</sup> The *Sramik League* is a trade union of workers associated with the ruling Awami League party in Bangladesh.

decades of development policy as embodied in the Washington consensus has been to ‘embed institutions... [such as] property rights, entry into markets, elections, or institutions of good governance’ in societies across the world (Ibid: 3). Arguably the assumption underlying such policy is that these societies are ‘flawed’ or ‘incomplete’ versions of Weberian states, and dynamics that do not adhere to this model represent a deficiency (North et al. 2015; Khan 2010a, 2013). One example which exemplifies this is analysis of corruption, which is often described as a disease - a cancer or plague - that undermines development efforts (Harrison 2006). The presence of corruption is often explained through notions of a ‘weak’ or ‘fragile’ state, assuming that the phenomenon observed can be accounted for by a lack of ‘good governance’ (North et al 2009; Khan 2010b). The solution advocated is to introduce the institutions and practices currently lacking. Like a disease, corruption can be beaten – so the logic goes – through introducing its opposite, accountability and transparency, public sector efficiency and the rule of law (Grindle 2010: 2), characteristics associated with the societies in which such policies are formed<sup>3</sup>.

Recent work on political settlements helps illuminate more precisely why this assumption is so misguided (North et al 2009; Khan 2010b, 2013). For North et al (2009) societies are organised according to fundamentally different principles, rooted in the way in which violence is controlled. These authors argue that social order in the vast majority of the world’s countries today and throughout history rests on a dispersed set of actors, organised as factions, coming together in a coalition to dominate rivals on the basis of their superior capability for violence (Ibid). This is termed the ‘ruling’ or ‘dominant’ coalition and stands in contrast to the classic Weberian model, where a centralised state holds a monopoly on violence and managed it bureaucratically according to the rule of law. This coalition extracts resources (or ‘rents’) from society, which incentivises them not to be violent, thereby enabling a degree of social stability and peace. These societies are termed ‘Limited Access Orders’ (LAOs). This framework suggests is that what can be seen as constituting ‘disorder’ or ‘corruption’ in one context, may in fact represent something quite different in another. Indeed, certain forms of violence and extortion can be seen as a means of enabling social stability (Ibid). Similarly, institutions that function one way in one society may do so differently elsewhere, highlighting the problem of introducing certain institutions in the expectation that they will behave in similar ways. Recognising the weakness of premising analysis on ideal models, re-focuses attention away from the need to explain disorder and dysfunction, and towards a focus on order and how it is constituted (Wood et al 2017).

The Northian framework of social order outlined above is built on in this thesis to understand the hierarchical relationships alluded to in the life of Golap. To date, this understanding of social order has been developed and applied empirically at a societal level, concerned with the broad formation of a ruling coalition, and macro analyses of

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<sup>3</sup> The extent to which the model of society that is used to judge others in fact exists in context such as Europe is of course an important question. Needless to say, it is assumed to exist.

societal change (North et al 2009; North et al 2012). The way North et al conceptualise a ruling coalition has focused on elites, however Khan (2010b) argues that a ruling coalition is always formed at different levels of society, with the relative power of actors over others, and organisational forms they take, differing significantly. This opens up the possibility – and highlights a need – for building on this framework to examine the lives of people much more broadly within society. This resonates with calls to examine these concepts through the experiences of ‘active agents’, their problems and strategies (Bates 2010: 755). In so doing, this thesis builds on this understanding of social order by theorising how it is experienced and viewed bottom up.

The context in which this framework is developed and applied is Bangladesh, a country recently described as a ‘vulnerable semi-mature LAO’ (Khan 2013). Bangladesh is poorly understood by the wider world (Lewis 2011). Despite the country’s many distinctions – for example its population size, its relatively consistent economic growth over recent decades, and its interesting place as a predominantly Muslim nation with a state identity teetering at the fringes of secularism – it has an underwhelming position in bookshelves, libraries and newspapers. Indeed, over a hundred years ago an Indian Civil Servant described East Bengal, observing that ‘the makers of books have left it for the most part severely alone’ (Bradley-Birt 1906: 3). The situation in Bangladesh today is not so bleak, and indeed there are reasons for optimism. International media coverage for one has become more dynamic even in the relatively small period that I have paid serious attention. When Bangladesh does make headlines it is unfortunately most often due to an association with corruption, mal-governance and dysfunctionality. Indeed, in the early 2000s Transparency International rated it the world’s most corrupt nation, a title it maintained for a number of years. Despite Van Schendel (2014: 2) describing academic work from Bangladesh as ‘infinitely richer’ today than it was forty years ago, significant neglect remains. One example is the tradition of village ethnographies that gave us insight into rural life over the past two generations but today has been ‘more or less lost’ (Hossain 2011a: 2).

Historically, most scholarly attention has been given to rural Bangladesh, and the tradition of ethnographies – with a few exceptions - never had an urban counterpart. This is understandable given that both the country’s economy and the majority of its people have been reliant on agriculture. However rapid urbanisation and the role of urban and peri-urban industry as a significant driver of growth increasingly challenge this focus. Dhaka is one of the fastest growing cities in the world although with the lowest GDP per capita of all megacities (UNHabitat 2013). The extent of urban poverty is debated; according to Government statistics 20% of the nation’s urban population live in poverty, while around 7% live in extreme poverty (BBS 2011: xxi), though the validity of these statistics is strongly contested (Rahman 2011; Banks

2012).<sup>4</sup> Despite the magnitude of challenges, less than 1% of Bangladesh's social protection expenditure is targeted on urban areas (Rahman and Choudhury 2012: 24), indicating serious state neglect. The increasing significance of urban settlements within Bangladesh, and the need to grapple with the issues they present, is juxtaposed against the traditional vision of Bangladesh as a nation, with the romanticised paddy fields, rivers and banyan trees of *amar sonar Bangla*<sup>5</sup> replaced with flyovers, traffic, slums and high-rises.

This thesis examines the lives of people living in similar circumstances to Golap in Dhaka city. These people often call themselves *kangali*, meaning destitute, and are described in international discourse through terms such as squatters, the homeless or street dwellers. This particular sub-group of the urban poor are neglected within academic research from Bangladesh, which has tended to focus on large and partially serviced slums. The *kangali* are conceptualised in public and government discourse as 'floating', 'rootless' and generally disconnected from the primary social, economic and political structures in Bangladesh. Many such people work in sectors where labour is organised, and hence findings here pertain to the urban poor more generally through the lens of organised labour. Research was conducted primarily in a large wholesale market at the centre of Dhaka called Karwan Bazar. A number of secondary locations included Osmani Uddyan park adjacent to Dhaka South City Corporation headquarters, the pavement outside the Supreme Court, and the pavement adjacent to Pantho Kunjo park near the five star Sonargaon hotel. Placing the theoretical focus together with the empirical context, the overarching question within this thesis is this: how do the *kangali* relate to the social order in urban Bangladesh?<sup>6</sup>

The core theoretical argument developed in this thesis is that the framework of social order outlined above intersects with the hierarchical relationships described in the life of Golap, through the organisation of violence. As such, the organisation of violence structures how the *kangali* relate to the social order. The logic of this argument is as follows: when social order rests on a dispersed set of actors maintaining a superior capability for violence than rivals, these actors utilise their status to extract resources from society. These resources are essential to maintaining the viability of factions, and hence are also essential to maintaining social order. A common way in which these actors extract resources from society is by controlling the access that others have to resources. What these resources are differ, and can mean access to space for living, to work, to personal security and much more. Viewed bottom-up, this represents a relationship of intermediation or brokerage, where personal relationships are essential to pursuing one's livelihood and interest. This posits that there is a close relationship between experiences of intermediation and violence, or put another way, that violent

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<sup>4</sup> Rahman (2011: 34-35) argues that the cost-of-basic-needs-approach used fails to consider the heavier reliance of urban households on cash income to survive, being unable to live from homestead or agricultural land. Furthermore, it may fail to consider price differentials between urban and rural areas for food and basic non-food items (Banks 2012).

<sup>5</sup> My Golden Bengal, Bangladesh's national anthem.

<sup>6</sup> Further sub-questions are offered in the methodology chapter.



intermediation is a function of how social order is maintained. How this intermediation is structured and negotiated is conceptualised as the ‘politics of intermediation’. This argument recasts a long history of studies concerned with hierarchical relationships, brokerage and intermediation, around the organisation of violence. Although the urban political economy has received a wave of attention in recent decades (Wood and Salway 2000; Khan 2000; Banks 2008; Shafi 2010; Hackenbroch 2011; Hossain 2011b; Hackenbroch and Hossain 2012; Hossain 2012; Hackenbroch 2013; Atkinson-Sheppard 2015; Suykens 2015; Banks 2016), the organisation and structure of violence, and the relationship between this and the lives of the poor, has not been systematically examined.

Empirically, this thesis contributes to understanding the social order in urban Bangladesh in three primary ways. The first – and perhaps the most significant – empirical argument developed is that one of the dominant ways in which the urban political economy of Bangladesh has been understood, is out-dated. For decades the figure of the *mastan*, which is akin to a gangster, has held a central place for understanding the environment in which the urban poor negotiate their lives, and for understanding how party politicians maintain control locally. The argument made in this thesis is that the gangs that *mastan*, and other similar terms, denote, have largely ceased to exist. Nevertheless many of the roles associated with these figures – such as extortion networks, controlling illegal businesses and mobilising people towards political violence – all continue, but now under an explicitly party political guise, controlled by the wings and associated bodies of the ruling Awami League. Understood within the LAO framework, this represents a shift in the organisational forms through which violence can be expressed and legitimately included into the ruling coalition, and therefore also a shift in the dominant forms of intermediation in the lives of the *kangali*. This argument is made primarily through tracing the rise and fall of *Picchi Hannan*, an infamous gangster at Karwan Bazar.

The second empirical contribution of this thesis is to offer a detailed account of how the *kangali* are integrated into the social order. A key argument developed is that the *kangali* are often highly dependent on violent intermediaries to maintain access to work and personal security, substantiating the posited relationship between violence and intermediation. The terms on which these are gained often necessitate payments and participation in political violence. These intermediaries represent a complex web of actors, critical among whom in the lives of the *kangali* are often labour leaders, known locally as *sardar* (headman, leader) or *boro bhai* (big brother). Despite the significance of these figures in Indian history, and their prevalence across Bangladesh today, they are rarely studied. These intermediaries play complex roles in people’s lives, they offer work, security, advice, support, access to savings and credit groups, and also position those underneath them in relation to wider social order. Groups of labour operate as factions in competition with others for work and power. Some labour leaders seek opportunities for their group by linking themselves to political leaders, and are thereby involved in wider political competition, which is often violent. The

privileged position of both labour and party political leaders enables them to extract financial benefits, and as such those beneath them often look at them with jealousy. These dynamics are explored through the cases of a group of market labourers at Karwan Bazar, drain workers at Osmani Uddyan park, and beggars outside the Supreme Court.

The third key empirical contribution of this thesis is an analysis of the diverse ways in which the *kangali* negotiate an environment characterised by violent intermediation. Two important phenomena are particularly analysed. The first is how groups of organised labour compete for opportunities on the basis of their capability for violence. This is examined through the case of market labourers' attempts to take over territory at Karwan Bazar, events included strikes, fights with the *Chattro League* (the student wing of the ruling Awami League) and police cases. The group also organised bombings on behalf of the opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The means by which people demonstrate a capability for violence are diverse. They include showing physical strength, the ability to call on contacts and networks, and it is argued here that savings groups can be vehicles for violent party political and factional mobilisation. The second form of negotiation is qualitatively distinct from the first, and rather than referring to how people negotiate their status through violence, it refers to how people pursue opportunities around this violence. The notion of 'defiled surpluses' is proposed as a way of conceptualising how people purposefully exploit resources that are considered socially defiled but are also surplus, in that access to them is not controlled by some of the intermediaries described above. Examples include begging, living in the open and scavenging.

This thesis is organised as such: chapter two examines the concept of social order and proposes seeing intermediation as inherent to how violence is organised in societies such as Bangladesh. This provides the core theoretical framework developed in this thesis. Chapter three examines the nature of intermediation in urban Bangladesh from both historical and contemporary sources, providing a background to the empirical chapters and introducing key debates regarding how intermediation is understood. Chapter four explains the methodology used in this thesis. Chapter five introduces the research context and people at the centre of this study. Chapter six examines the nature of intermediation in Dhaka today, challenging the view that *mastan* gangs are dominant, and explores the forms of party political intermediaries now prevalent. Chapter seven examines the significance of labour leaders as intermediaries in the lives of the *kangali*. Chapter eight and nine explore how people negotiate their lives within this order. The conclusion consolidates many of the key theoretical and empirical arguments, returning to key sub-questions posed in the methodology.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING ORDER

*Whatever else they do, governments organize and, wherever possible, monopolize  
violence*

Tilly (1985: 171)

This chapter builds on recent work on violence and social orders (North et al 2009) by positing a relationship between how order is maintained in societies such as Bangladesh, and intermediation, or brokerage, a dynamic to community life studied since at least the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The connection is the organisation of violence. Mediating the access that other people have to resources is posited as a key means by which a ‘ruling coalition’ accrues resources, and therefore intermediation contributes to enabling social order. This suggests that the phenomenon of intermediation must be analysed in relation to how a ruling coalition is formed, and how this coalition maintains its status within society. In drawing attention to these relationships, this chapter opens up questions regarding patron-clientelism, the key concept used to frame these relationships, and in light of the proposition of the connection between violence and intermediation. The chapter further argues that where people are dependent on intermediaries to pursue their interests, it is in relation to these actors that people’s struggles and strategies to improve their lives should be examined. Empirical examples from South Asia and beyond are drawn upon to build and illustrate the arguments made.

### 2.1. SOCIAL ORDERS

#### 2.1.1. THE ORGANISATION OF VIOLENCE

The concept of social order can be defined in basic as ‘patterns of social organization’ that control violence and thereby enable social stability (North et al. 2009: 1). Conceptualisations of social order prominent within international development often rest on a Liberal democratic framework (Davis and McGregor 2000; Brett 2008), underpinned by Weberian assumptions around the structure and role of the state (Khan 2010b). This framework informs how society is understood as functioning, how stability is ensured, and most critically for development practice, how change happens. According to this Liberal model social order is premised on the impersonal rule of law (Somers 2008; North et al 2009), which is enforced by a central state monopolising violence (Khan 2010b). In this model, individuals exist within such societies on the basis of their status as citizens. Within liberal democracies, all citizens thus theoretically relate to one another, and to society as a whole, on the basis of individual rights accorded to them impersonally by the state (North et al. 2009). As Kabeer (2002: 9) explains, ‘the idea of citizenship... [is] rooted in an ontology of personhood which recognises individuals as bearing rights which are prior to, and independent of, their place in status hierarchies’.

Within this model, the role of the state is to ensure that citizens have these rights, and that all have them equally, and it does so by maintaining the rule of law. Fundamental to how the state maintains the rule of law is by monopolising violence within the apparatus of the state, such as the police and armed forces. More generally, such societies are conceptualised as being structured through three demarcated “spheres” - the market, civil society and the state – which are independent, and yet interdependent, complementing and balancing each other. This is what Axtmann (1997: 65) terms a ‘tripartite structure’, and was conceptualised clearly in the work of De Tocqueville. Within this framework, civil society is seen as denoting ‘the organised sphere of citizens activity beyond the state, market and household’ (Lewis 2011: 125). This activity is however imbued with a particular normative content. It is seen as promoting a very particular set of ‘civic’ values, providing a check against the power of the state (North et al. 2009: 7), and part of ‘the ongoing struggle for egalitarian diversity’ (Keane 2009: 4).

The analytical relevance of a Liberal and Weberian models of the state in much of the world is challenged by recent work on political settlements (North et al 2009; Khan 2010b). For North, Wallis and Weingast (2009) societies are organised in fundamentally different ways. The key difference, they argue, lies in how societies control organised violence and they posit a distinction between two types of social order – ‘limited access orders’ (LAOs) and ‘open access orders’ (OAOs). The latter of these broadly corresponds to the Liberal model of society discussed above, while the former refers to most of the world’s societies, including those in the Global South. In the case of OAOs violence is controlled through institutionalised rules controlling competition, which regulate impersonally through incentives and punishment, based on the rule of law. The defining characteristic of OAOs is impersonality (Ibid: 23), and it is on this basis that citizens relate. The state has a monopoly in organised violence, with the police and armed forces subservient to the government and democratic interests; and more broadly such social orders are characterised by ‘competition in political and economic markets’ (Ibid: 21-22).

By contrast, in LAOs the impersonal rule of law is weak. In such contexts, violence is controlled, and hence stability enabled, through the distribution of benefits to a coalition of actors that have established a greater capability for violence than rivals<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> They further sub-divide between three forms of LAO - fragile, basic and mature – which are distinguished according to the complexity of institutional structures they can maintain. LAOs are also termed ‘natural states’. North et al (2009) posit a number of conditions necessary for a transition between a LAO and an OAO. They argue this transition occurs in two stages: first, there is the emergence of impersonal intra-elite relationships; and second, these impersonal relationships are extended to others within society. The conditions that enable the first of these transitions are labelled ‘doorstep conditions’. These are conditions that enable intra-elite relationships to be impersonal. They are: first, the rule of law for elites, which enables the elite to relate on impersonal terms to one another; second, ‘perpetually lived forms of public and private elite organizations, including the state itself’, meaning that organisations can exist beyond the rule of particular ruling coalitions, and beyond the death of any particular members; third, that there is political control over the military (Ibid: 27). By contrast, in Khan’s model (2010b) attention is given not to these doorstep conditions, but to how the

A coalition is required because no one single actor can monopolise violence. The benefits accrued and distributed are diverse, including the ‘manipulation of economic privileges’ (Ibid: 122) - for example the right to trade, control or have a monopoly over a market – as well as the ability to organise. Violence is controlled by actors within that coalition agreeing to maintain their mutual privileges but excluding others from these, thereby creating incentives to cooperate within coalitions. Controlling these resources is also a means by which these actors can maintain their own power, through, for example, incentivising members to remain supportive of them. In their own words, a LAO

manages the problem of violence by forming a dominant coalition that limits access to valuable resources – land, labor, and capital – or access to and control of valuable activities – such as trade, worship, and education (Ibid: 30).

This proposition radically challenges the demarcation of “spheres” essential to the Liberal notion of social order, reorienting a framework around the idea of a ‘ruling’ or ‘dominant’ coalition, and the distribution of benefits. Fundamental to this framework is an understanding of how violence is organised in societies that is radically different to Liberal Weberian assumptions about the monopolisation of violence by a centralised state. LAOs are characterised by the dispersed ability for organising violence, which is why social order rests on these actors being sufficiently incentivised not to use this ability. As Khan (2013: 34) writes, a basic LAO ‘can only be stable if, by accident or design, enough of the potential organizers of violence are included within the ruling group’. For order to emerge, a LAO has to enable a ‘double balance’ (North et al 2009), where the potential one has for violence corresponds to the – most often economic - benefits one receives.

The forms that LAOs take differ and given the breadth of the model, a whole range of ostensibly different societies are included under this label. Despite this diversity, according to this framework these societies share basic structural characteristics, in that the ruling coalition is organised as factions linked hierarchically. Khan (2010a: 12) argues that

Looking from the bottom up, the basic component of any party or coalition, however large, is a myriad of basic patron-client factions. Each of these is organized around a single or small group of leaders.

Despite the conceptual significance of factions, the literature used to conceptualise social order in this section does not clearly define its meaning. Nicholas’ (1965) definition is adopted in this thesis, and in summary refers to a group, organised hierarchically under a leader that is in conflict with other groups of similar characteristics for status and resources. More specifically, five interrelated characteristics are emphasised: first, that factions are conflict groups; second, that they

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emergence of capitalist organizations enable ‘formal power’ to dominate society, creating a capitalist political settlement rather than those premised on ruling coalitions structured through factions.

are political in the sense that it is through factions that conflict for power takes; third, they are timebound and not corporate groups; fourth, members are recruited by a leader and fifth, these members are recruited on diverse principles (Nicholas 1965: 27-29).

Although Khan (2010b) and North et al (2009) agree that social order in LAOs rests on the role of a dominant coalition, they differ in where they see power as concentrated within these coalitions. North et al (2009) focus on the ruling coalition as a set of elites who stand at the head of wider organisations and networks, which are organised throughout society. Social order is maintained through elite competition, and by mobilising other actors to support them. By contrast, Khan (2010b; 2013) offers a way of conceptualising different forms that a dominant coalition can take, and how these include actors at various hierarchical levels within society. For Khan, social order then refers not only to an arrangement between elites, but the interconnection between groups of people at different levels of society. He argues that while all coalitions require a degree of support from different hierarchical levels in society, they differ in terms of the factions and networks included, and the balance of power between these.

More specifically, Khan (2010) distinguishes the forms that a ruling or dominant coalition takes according to the relative power along horizontal or vertical lines, the former referring to the balance of power between factions within and outside the ruling coalition, while the latter referring to the balance of power between higher and lower factions within the coalition. Within Khan's schema ruling coalitions can take four forms according to these differences, though in practice they may differ in degree rather than categorically<sup>8</sup>. A prominent form of political settlement across the world and empirically within this thesis due to its application to Bangladesh, is the 'competitive clientelism' model, where both excluded factions and lower level factions within the coalition are strong. In such societies a dominant coalition balances the inclusion of potential factions with the ability to distribute benefits, and factions outside of this coalition mobilise to either attempt inclusion or form a new coalition. The extent to which a dominant coalition remains stable clearly differs across contexts and throughout history. It has been very common for new coalitions to emerge and replace existing ones, a process that is often violent (North et al 2009).

The recognition that social order rests on a coalition organised at different levels of society, draws attention to the roles of 'violence specialists' (Tilly 1985). This incorporates a wide set of actors. In his analysis of European state building, Tilly (1985: 174) argues that monarchs 'relied on indirect rule via local magnates' where 'a

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<sup>8</sup> Within Khan's (2010b) model, clientelist political settlements – or what North et al term LAOs – can be distinguished by these two key variables in the balance of power. The potential for growth and development is strongest when both lower and excluded factions are weak, because the dominant coalition has longer time horizons. Khan terms this a 'potential developmental coalition'. Where excluded factions are strong, however lower factions within the coalition weak, the state is authoritarian but vulnerable. By contrast where lower factions within the coalition are strong, but excluded factions weak, the settlement is characterised by a dominant party. The fourth model – competitive clientelism – is explained in the text above.

king's best source of armed supporter was sometimes the world of outlaws' (Ibid: 173). Historically, European monarchs and states relied on a wide range of actors to maintain a dominant capability for violence and govern the societies they ruled. More broadly, the organisational forms through which violence is expressed clearly differ, and could include knights, standing armies, mafia, gangsters, militia, guerrillas and many more. Indeed, internationally European states often relied on privateers and mercenaries to maintain and increase their power (Thomson 1996). Which actors constitute the ruling coalition, the precise relationships between these and between members within these groups, are contextually specific empirical questions. Furthermore, within the LAO framework, the means of violence is never completely monopolised by the dominant coalition, and it is logical to assume that actors outside of the coalition have some degree of control over resources, which are valuable in their own right, but also instrumental to maintaining an ability for violence.

Within the LAO framework the ability for violence is central to gaining access to the dominant coalition. Khan (2010a, 2010b, 2013) uses a range of similar terms to describe this, including 'organizational power', 'organizational muscle', 'instruments of violence', 'violence capabilities' and 'disruptive capacity'. North et al (2015) similarly write of 'violence capacity'. For Khan (2010b: 6) this ability forms part of what he terms 'holding power', which refers to 'the capability of an individual or group to engage and survive in conflicts' and thus conceptualises how groups compete for status within and in relation to a dominant coalition<sup>9</sup>. Holding power involves both 'imposing' and 'absorbing' costs, for which economic strength, a perception of legitimacy and the ability to organize violence all form part (Ibid). Within this concept, these characteristics interact, for example economic strength can enable an ability to organize. Given the centrality of violence within the framework of social order outlined above, the term 'capability for violence' or 'violence capability' is focused on in this thesis as a way of conceptualising how actors impose costs on each other, and this opens up empirical questions regarding how this capability is constituted and how it interacts with other characteristics, factors or qualities to enable a group to impose or absorb costs<sup>10</sup>.

These notion of a 'capability for violence' can be further theorised through consideration of Lukes' (2004) three 'faces' or 'dimensions' of power<sup>11</sup>. Within Lukes' framework, power in both the first and second dimensions refer to observable

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<sup>9</sup> The notion of 'holding power' resembles the ability to coerce and resist coercion from others. Tilly (2008: 19) describes coercion as that which 'includes all concerted application, threatened or actual, of action that commonly causes loss or damage to the persons or possessions of individuals or groups who are aware of both the action and the potential damage'.

<sup>10</sup> The focus given here to the capability for violence is not to suggest that this capability underlies all forms of authority and hierarchy, nor that all decisions and preferences are formed on the basis of an unequal capability for violence. The authority gained from seniority within organisations such as NGOs may or may not be underpinned by an association with violence for example. The point emphasised here is that in societies where a balance between the distribution of resources and a capability for violence is essential to social order, it is this capability that should be viewed as a fundamental form that power takes.

<sup>11</sup> Thank you to Joe Devine and Geof Wood for suggesting this usage.

conflict. Power in the first dimension is making someone do something against their interests, and analysis of power in this sense focuses on examining conflict, people's behaviour and interests. Power in the second dimension is the ability to control an agenda, as in what does or does not become an object of conflict. Analysis of power in this sense focuses on how conflict can therefore exist in non-decision making. Finally the third dimension of power, Lukes' primary theoretical contribution, is conceptualised as the most powerful. This dimension draws attention away from observable conflict and towards the power to control preferences about what one does or does not want. According to this third dimension, conflict is not necessarily manifest but can be 'latent' (Ibid: 28). As Lukes (2004: 27) writes, 'the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place'. Reflecting on the difference between the first and third dimension within this framework enables us to draw a conceptual distinction within the notion of a capability for violence. While in relation to the first dimension, the capability for violence can be thought of as an ability to use direct force, in the third dimension it refers to how a capability for violence can inculcate perceptions in others about what is or what is not possible, such that people adhere to interests without violence being used, and without conflict being made manifest. Though not manifest, conflict or violence can nonetheless be 'latent', underlying the relationships and phenomenon observed.

At its most basic then the capability for violence refers to the capability of an actor to coerce others through direct force. It can denote that they have the physical and mental attributes associated with this (including an association with a weapon for example). Often actors wield this capability indirectly. We can think of how people utilise connections with figures of authority (in the army or police for example) who can themselves directly draw upon a capability for violence. This also characterises the ways leaders utilise faction members to compete, a primary focus in this model of social order (North et al 2009; Khan 2010b). The capability for violence within factions comes from the ability of a leader to direct followers towards that end. In both the case of a faction and connections with a wider authority, a range of factors contribute to enabling this capability, as in the notion of holding power (Khan 2010b). Being able to provide materially may be critical in both instances, and is theorised in this model as essential to incentivising faction members and therefore a capability for violence (North et al 2009; Khan 2010b). Other factors including charisma for example may also strengthen the resolve of a faction and thereby increase their capability for violence. In line with Lukes' third dimension of power, the capability for violence can also refer to the capability of an actor to coerce people through the threat or potential for violence, without needing to in fact use it. Indeed, a greater capability for violence is associated with a reduced need to use it, as people perceive the costs of testing it as too high (Khan 2010a: 68). As Tilly (2003: 36) writes the 'genuinely effective specialist deploys threats of violence so persuasively that others comply before the damage begins'. Though the notion of a threat may seem overt and explicit, it can also be implicit or latent. The capability for violence may refer to a



common understanding that people have about the potential consequences of a specific actions and therefore a disinclination or calculation to avoid such actions.

This model of social order draws analytical attention to the structure of a ‘ruling coalition’, the capability for violence, and the way in which this coalition controls the distribution of resources within society to ensure order. By demonstrating how social order rests on a dispersed rather than centralised capability for violence this framework challenges the application of a Weberian model of the state. For this reason, North et al (2009: 72-73) have pointed to the ‘futility of drawing hard and fast lines around governments in natural states and calling them the state’. Rather than the state being conceptualised as a single, unitary or centralised actor, it may be thought of as the ruling coalition itself, hence the claim that in LAOs the state is an ‘organization of organizations’ (North et al 2009: 31). This model furthermore deconstructs a Liberal distinction between “spheres” by arguing that the state and market are deeply intertwined, partly because it is the distribution of economic benefits, which creates the credible incentives to cooperate and thereby enable social order. Civil society – if the concept it used at all – may not be the counterbalance to the state imagined in the Liberal model, but rather ‘function[s] with the explicit support of the state’ (North et al 2009: 7). This resonates with arguments from other authors who have also contested the boundaries between these spheres (Bierschenk et al. 2002; Harriss-White 2003b; Berenschot 2010; Wood 2014). Wood (2014), for example, argues that in such contexts political and economic life are ‘interlocked’. Similarly, De Bierschenk et al. (2002: 36) argue that in Africa the boundaries between the state, civil society and ‘formal local political organisations’ are ‘overlapping and... marked by phenomena of alliance and rivalry, which renders these ‘bounded’ categories less efficient as means of understanding the nature of the changes underway’. The next section builds on this model by further conceptualising the place of individuals within such societies.

#### 2.1.2. INTERMEDIATION

The previous section outlined the LAO framework, discussed the forms that ruling coalitions can take (Khan 2010b, 2013), and considered the role that the capability for violence has within such societies. Using these ideas, this section theorises the place of individuals within such societies. The key argument developed is that this model of social order translates into people’s lives through the phenomenon of brokerage or intermediation. Intermediation is proposed as a way in which actors with the capability for violence accrue resources, and limit the access other have to them, and therefore the phenomenon of intermediation which has been observed across the world should be understood in relation to how the capability for violence is organised and thus how social order is maintained.

In LAOs, people are not considered as individuals on the basis of impersonal rights, applied and guaranteed through the rule of law – as in the Weberian Liberal model - but on the basis of ‘personal relationships, who one is and who one knows’ (North et al. 2009: 2). Chatterjee (2004: 38) argues similarly in the context of India

In terms of the formal structure of the state as given by the constitution and the laws, all of society is civil society; everyone is a citizen with equal rights... [However] most of the inhabitants of India are only tenuously, and even then ambiguously and contextually, rights-bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution. They are not, therefore, proper members of civil society and are not regarded as such by the institutions of the state.

That people need personal relationships to survive and seek opportunities has been observed across the world through a long lineage of studies within the social sciences. This is often framed this in terms of the need for ‘brokers’ or ‘intermediaries’ (Wolf 1956; Tilly 1985; Auyero 2000; de Sardan et al. 2002; Wood 2003; Devine 2009). Though the term broker is often colloquially used to refer to very specific actors within societies, a wide range of actors can be understood as involved in brokerage<sup>12</sup>. At its most basic brokerage can be understood as the ‘production of a new connection between previously unconnected sites’ (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 31). Research on brokerage can be traced back to work by British Africanists in the 1930s, and more clearly through the field of political anthropology until the 1960s (de Sardan et al. 2002)<sup>13</sup>. Wolf (1956: 1076), for example, portrays brokers as actors who ‘stand guard over the crucial junctures of synapses of relationships which connect the local system to the larger whole’. Some have suggested that the role of these brokers or intermediaries is so considerable that they are inherent to the structure of certain societies. Wood (2010) writes of ‘intermediation societies’, while Berenschot (2010) similarly writes of a ‘mediated state’.

The argument advanced here is that the phenomenon of intermediation or brokerage observed across the world is inherently linked to how social order is maintained, which is to say, how the capability for violence is organised and resources controlled. The logic of this argument is as follows: within the LAO framework, a dominant coalition forms through its superior capability for violence. On this basis actors within the coalition are able to accrue resources from society; and indeed they need to do so in order to maintain their capability for violence and thus status within the coalition. This raises the question of *how* these actors accrue these resources. Khan (2010a: 86) argues that these are accrued from varied non-formal sources in society:

If political leaders running mass clientelist coalitions do not have resources from non-formal sources, they will be unable to manage the informal distributive arrangements on which a clientelist political settlement is based.

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<sup>12</sup> In Bangladesh for example the term for a broker or middleman is *dalal*, and to say someone does *dalali*, is to say they are acting as a middleman/broker. In practice however a far wider range of actors beyond those explicitly identified as *dalal* broker people’s access to resources. Furthermore, the language of brokerage often implies a limited exchange, however the emphasis here is on longer-term relationships. For these reasons intermediation is the preferred term in this thesis.

<sup>13</sup> An interest in brokerage has re-emerged within anthropology, sociology and development studies since the late 1990s, with a particular focus on political brokers, but with the concept being applied more broadly, even to the development sector (Bierschenk et al. 2002; Mosse and Lewis 2006).

It can be argued that a prominent means by which these resources are accrued is through mediating the access that others have to the resources they need to pursue their livelihoods and interests. Viewed bottom-up, this is experienced in people's lives as a need for intermediation, a personal relationship to gain access to resources<sup>14</sup>. This raises empirical questions about what is mediated in any given context, but to name only a few such resources it could include: labour markets, the right to trade, housing, state services, justice and personal security<sup>15</sup>. In mediating access to resources, a coalition is able to accrue sufficient resources to maintain its own power, while also enabling them to limit the resources that others and rivals have, thereby ensuring other actors outside of the coalition do not enjoy the same privileges. Given that coalitions are organised as factions, leaders of factions need to accrue resources in order to maintain the viability of their faction, their place within the ruling coalition, and hence the stability of the coalition and social order. What this suggests is that the phenomenon of intermediation or brokerage is partly a function of how social order is maintained in LAOs.

This argument posits a close relationship between being an intermediary and being a violence specialist. The historical connection between intermediation and a ruling coalition emerges also from Tilly's work on European state building. Tilly (2008: 104), wrote

Larger states... invariably opted for some form of indirect rule, co-opting local powerholders and confirming their privileges... Before the seventeenth century, every large European state ruled its subjects through powerful intermediaries who enjoyed significant autonomy, hindered state demands that were not to their own interest, and profited on their own accounts from the delegated exercise of state power<sup>16</sup>

Understood in relation to the LAO framework, this quote also suggests a number of further dynamics to intermediation. First, it indicates that by virtue of this capability for violence those within the ruling coalition are able to control resources to pursue their own interests, above and beyond what is needed simply to maintain power<sup>17</sup>. The actual dynamics of intermediation may be a function of the interests that individuals actors within the coalition have and the conditions they face. Second, as already

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<sup>14</sup> It is recognized that not all forms of brokerage involve people of lower status seeking resources through people of higher status (Scott 1972); however these other forms of brokerage are not focused on in this thesis.

<sup>15</sup> This is not to assume that actors with a capability for violence necessarily mediate access to all resources. Which resources are not mediated in this way is an interesting empirical question, and explored particularly in chapter nine within this thesis.

<sup>16</sup> The idea of state power being 'delegated' is not entirely in accord with the Northian model proposed here. Delegation implies that power is rooted in the centre and disperses from there, whereas the model described emphasizes how status stems from a dispersed capability for violence.

<sup>17</sup> As Tilly (2003: 40) writes of violence specialists: 'specialists in violence do not simply serve the interests of the larger entities (governments, parties, communities, ethnic groups, or others) with which they are currently aligned. They follow dynamics of their own. They regularly engage in exploitation and opportunity hoarding, sometimes at the expense of their own nominal employers or constituencies'

suggested in the previous section, the quote also indicates how the balance of power within a coalition can vary. If lower level factions within the ruling coalition have significant power – as it appears in the quote from Tilly above – it may be that they are more able to pursue their interests, which may have significance for how other people relate to these actors as intermediaries. Similarly, if the balance of power between the ruling coalition and rivals outside the coalition is almost balanced, it may mean that people and groups with a capability for violence still control resources and operate as intermediaries from outside the ruling coalition.

An implication of the intermediation-violence framework is that it brings together analysis of a wide range of actors. Tilly (2008: 104) describes the ‘intermediaries’ or ‘middlemen’ under systems of indirect rule by overarching states in the historical setting of Southeastern Europe as including ‘clergy, landlords, urban oligarchies, and independent professional warriors’. More recently Auyero’s (2000: 58) analysis of intermediation, and the ‘problem-solving networks that link “clients,” brokers, and political patrons’ at the grass roots in Buenos Aires highlights the brokering roles of ‘NGO leaders, development agents, peasant association chairmen, association activists, facilitators, co-ordinators, politicians, clerks...’ (Ibid: 20) <sup>18</sup>. In line with this, when understanding intermediation in relation to violence and social order, actors who are often seen in qualitatively different terms can be analysed as playing structurally similar roles. In South Asia the term intermediary has been used to refer to, for example, labour leaders (RCLI 1931; Mishra 2015; Wadauer et al. 2015), NGOs (White 1992, Devine 1999), as well as actors straddling criminality and party politics (Ahmed 2004, Devine 2007; Berenschot 2011; Wood 2014). Whether all actors identified as intermediaries do so on the basis of a capability for violence is an empirical question, and also raises questions regarding the extent to which actors that are seen as embodying different values are able to operate without this capability, or in conflict with actors who do have this capability (Devine 1999)<sup>19</sup>.

Recognising how social order is contingent on a dominant coalition mediating access to resources helps understand why violent intermediaries have been observed to be so prevalent across the world. In urban South Asia for example, much attention has been given to the intermediary roles of violent criminal figures integrated into both local communities and wider party politics. What these figures look like in Bangladesh will be discussed in the next chapter, however in India the figure of the *goonda* is often examined (Michelutti 2007; Berenschot 2011; Piliavsky and Sbriccoli 2016). The term

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<sup>18</sup> Studying a slum outside Buenos Aires, Auyero argues that the poor were, at the time of his study, increasingly reliant on political networks to gain access to state resources such as public jobs and social protection. These are managed through “brokers” or “gatekeepers” who are local leaders, connected to wider political and state institutions.

<sup>19</sup> The notion of intermediation in the sense it is used here resonates with Khan’s (2010b) use of Kalecki’s (1972) notion of an ‘intermediate class’. Khan refers to how ‘intermediate classes’ between the poor and capitalists, dominate the organisation of patron-client politics. For Khan, though classes, they function on a factional rather than class basis. The sense that intermediation is concentrated within particular classes is useful, though as will be clear from this thesis, actors living in bazars or the streets can also operate as powerful intermediaries within their context.

*goonda* is historically translated as ‘ruffian’ or ‘hooligan’, and is a prominent figure in urban South Asian politics throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Das 1994). Berenschot (2010, 2011) has examined how these figures are essential to party politicians maintaining local control, helping rig elections, raise money for political campaigns, and generally enforcing the politicians control through violence. He argues that it is these figures that partly enable politicians to serve as intermediaries between the government and the poor. In literature from Latin America and the Caribbean the roles of gangs and gangsters have been highlighted as playing similar roles (Johnson 2005; Arias 2006; Rodgers 2006). Johnson (2005), for example, documents the ways ‘community dons’ or ‘garrisons’ mediate between poor communities and the state in Jamaica, highlighting the significant control and capability for violence these actors have. Similarly, Arias (2006) examines how drug traffickers play a key brokering role between *favela* communities in Rio de Janeiro and politicians. A theme of this work is demonstrating how these actors represent not disorder, but a way in which society and communities are organised (Johnson 2005; Rodgers 2006; Arias 2006). Studying a youth gang in Nicaragua against the backdrop of state breakdown, Rodgers (2006: 273) argues that they give an order to the community in which they live, and thereby ‘attempts to mitigate... insecurity’, but at the same time sit at a distance from the state. As this highlights, it is important to note that the extent to which these gangs are linked hierarchically to more senior actors, and hence the ruling coalition, differs. Similarly Volkov (2002: 1) explores the rise of ‘violent entrepreneurs’ in Russia in the 1990s, describing how the breakup of the Soviet Union allowed for ‘the advance of bandits’ in cities, specialising in protection racketeering<sup>20</sup>.

Finally, it is important to give the term intermediation a second meaning. Up to now it has been used to refer to the how personal relationships are relied upon to access the resources needed to pursue livelihoods and interests. As argued, this is intimately connected to the ruling coalition and ultimately to how violence is controlled. Intermediation can also be conceptualised as referring to the role that identities play in mediating people’s access to resources. In contexts where ‘who one is and who one knows, form the basis for social organization’ (North et al. 2009: 2), identities interact with intermediation in the first sense to mediate access to resources, and hence determine experiences of opportunities, risks and so forth. Intermediation can then also be conceptualised as referring to how access to resources is determined by the identities people are understood as having<sup>21</sup>. As Mosse (2010: 1163) argues, ‘the organisation of categories takes precedence over the attributes of individuals’,

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<sup>20</sup> It is important to offer a caveat at this point. The discussion so far has taken societies as the unit of analysis, with the assumption being that arguments relate equally across any given society. This is not necessarily the case. While a society may be categorised as a LAO or OAO this does not mean that all communities within that will, at a micro-level, demonstrate patterns of organisation that always conform to these ideals. Rather, we should see this broad distinction as reflecting the balance of weight, but not as accounting for all dynamics present in that context. Hence forms of intermediation may exist in all societies, but these do not connect to a ‘ruling coalition’ and how social order is maintained.

<sup>21</sup> That intermediation refers to these two processes mirrors Mosse’s (2010) incorporation of both economic and political relations, as well as ‘social categorisation and identity’ in his notion of a ‘relational’ approach to poverty’.

meaning that individuals exist on the basis of a wide range of identities. These are categorised and ‘labelled’ by others in society (Wood 1985) and can condition the type and nature of intermediation people are able to experience, and hence the nature of their access to resources. ‘Categorical’ inequalities can thus form along these lines (Tilly 1999), with ‘bounded’ categories representing deeply rooted or permanent identities relating to, for example, caste, ethnicity or gender. The ways and extent to which these two forms of intermediation interrelate are empirical questions.

This section has argued that the phenomenon of intermediation or brokerage which has been studied across the world should be understood in relation to how social order is maintained. Following the LAO framework, this rests on a ruling coalition establishing a superior capability for violence which they utilise to mediate the access other people have to resources. The second half of this chapter engages further with the dynamics of intermediation, asking how such relationships can be conceptualised, and what this means for how people negotiate and advance their interests within such societies.

## 2.2. THE DYNAMICS OF INTERMEDIATION

This chapter has built from recent macro theoretical frameworks on social order (North et al 2009; Khan 2010b), to conceptualise how the poor experience societies where social order rests on controlling a dispersed capability for violence. The phenomenon of intermediation has been posited as critical to how social order is maintained, because mediating the access others have to resources is arguably a key means by which a ruling coalition accrues the resources they need to maintain their power. If the connection between violence capabilities and intermediation is accepted, then this should be seen as central to how the poor pursue their livelihoods and interests. This section opens up a discussion about how we can understand the dynamics of intermediation. The first section reflects on how intermediation is negotiated; while the second further examines how we conceptualise the relationships people have to intermediaries.

### 2.2.1. THE POLITICS OF INTERMEDIATION

If intermediation is a structural characteristic to LAOs, then relationships with actors who have a capability for violence are fundamental to how people negotiate their lives within such societies. The model of social order from which this chapter has built however holds that the actors who form a ruling coalition, the resources that they control and the limits to these, are not fixed, but in flux as factors internal and external to society change (North et al 2009). Logically the status people have in such societies should also not be seen as fixed, but contingent on the relationships that they build, maintain and negotiate, and subject to the ways these are influenced by wider factors. The sense of movement that this understanding creates is captured well by the concept of ‘social navigation’, which refers to the ‘the act of moving in an environment that is wavering and unsettled’ (Vigh 2009: 420). Social navigation draws attention to the dynamic reality of people navigating their lives, continuously assessing and

strategizing, and moving in ways that try to predict and foresee what will be advantageous<sup>22</sup>. Whereas analogies of ‘fields’ or ‘landscapes’ create an image of a fixed environment, navigation has the advantage of pointing to the ‘socially *immediate* and the socially *imagined*’ (Ibid: 425, italics in original), where people ‘constantly live – on one level or another – with an eye to movement’ (Ibid: 431)<sup>23</sup>.

These descriptions create the sense that people are strategic actors, however some authors take issue with this idea. For Scheper-Hughes (1992: 471) the term ‘strategy’ is inappropriate to describe the ways people survive in everyday life because it

implies that people are consciously organized and prepared for action. It suggests that they have a clear-sighted vision of the lay of the land and a certain knowledge of the “enemy,” that they can look (optimistically) to the future, and that they can plan toward an upset victory.

Drawing on the work of De Certeau (1984) she prefers the term ‘tactic’ which are ‘defensive and individual, not aggressive and collective, practices’ (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 472). Read another way however strategy can simply imply planning ahead, assessing where we are, what lies before us, and trying to manoeuvre in a way that meets certain ends. Whether for the poor, the ‘power that constrains them is so encompassing... that it has obscured their field of vision’ (Ibid: 472) is an empirical question and it does not seem fair or reasonable to deny any possibility that people are strategic just because they are poor.

While navigation then serves as an analogy to understand people’s approach to social environments, the notion of negotiation perhaps more accurately captures the exchanges and dynamics of people gaining, maintaining and improving access to resources through relationships. The centrality of violence to the understanding of social order built upon here suggests that negotiation must be understood in relation to a capability for violence. The power of the ruling coalition is conceptualised as premised on this capability, and intermediation has been posited here as a means by which this capability is maintained. This suggests that a primary means by which people attempt to improve their status in such societies is through using violence. As Khan (2010b: 7) writes, ‘conflict itself is often the only mechanism for demonstrating and establishing holding power so that subsequent distributions reflect this underlying

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<sup>22</sup> In Guinea the sense of navigation is expressed through the concept of *dubriagem* (Vigh 2009: 423). Searching for equivalents in other languages, Vigh suggests ‘muddling through’, though this seems to be a quintessentially English way of downplaying something more significant or purposeful. A more accurate sense could be the idea of ‘reading a situation’.

<sup>23</sup> Speaking of an encounter with his research informants in Guinea, Vigh eloquently describes them: ‘as they were talking, Pedro started moving his upper body in a disjointed yet rhythmical sway. Looking somewhat as if he was shadow boxing he wove and bobbed his torso back and forth as though dodging invisible pulls and pushes. Only later did it dawn on me that what he was in fact dodging were the pulls and pushes of social forces. His metaphorical shadowboxing was an embodied description of how one moves through a social environment in motion’ (Vigh 2010: 150). This is similar to Venkatesh’s (2013: 54) descriptions of how people in poorer neighbourhoods navigate New York City. He describes the advice he got from a drug dealer: ‘I had to bounce, I had to float, I had to jump and hop and bob and weave’.

power'. To be able to control resources, one must then establish and demonstrate a capability for violence. This way of negotiating access can be deepened through considering Tilly's (1997, 2003) notion of 'contentious politics'. For Tilly contentious politics builds on 'three familiar features of social life: contention, collective action, and politics' (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 4). Contention involves making claims, which are 'statements of preference with respect to the behaviour of specific other people' (Tilly 1997: 56). Public claims include 'demands, attacks, petitions, supplications, affirmations of support or opposition, and declarations of obligation' (Ibid: 56). Collective action is where there are 'coordinating efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs' (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 5); and finally, contentious collective action is defined as politics when it involves the state or government.

Some authors have however critiqued this focus for its 'damagingly narrow and poverty-stricken view of political action' (Scott 2008: 33) that has been 'enormously distorted in a state-centric direction' (Ibid: 49). Scott points to a multitude of different activities which for him constitute politics, but which are not directed towards the state. These include surreptitious forms of resistance to local elites, the so-called 'weapons of the weak', which emphasise how 'quiet, disguised and anonymous', as well isolated, unorganised and often individual acts are in fact ubiquitous examples of class conflict in normal life (Scott 2008: 37). This debate about what should constitute politics is often characterised through a distinction between 'big' and 'little' politics. Tilly and Tarrow (2007) give three 'big reasons' why they focus on the government: the government is a power base, they control the rules that govern contention, and they control the means of coercion. In a LAO, however, 'the state' is not so easy to define, and North et al (2009) frame it in terms of the 'ruling coalition', a coalition of actors that is weaved throughout society as a network of factions. Logically then 'the state' is not a distant entity but can be very much present in people's lives. This suggests that in LAOs conventional distinctions between 'big' and 'little' politics are not as dichotomous as they are often presented to be.

Understanding how people employ violence or its threat to gain access to resources is therefore an important empirical question. Factional conflict has long been identified as a dominant form this takes (Nicholas 1965; Bailey 1969; Scott 1972) however we need to be attentive to the diverse ways this can be materialised. Hossain's (2010) concept of 'rude accountability' offers one such example. Rude accountability refers to the ways in which people informally negotiate access to resources in contexts where resource distribution is not managed on the basis of impersonal rules. Examples include the subtle threat of humiliation, or even the veiled threat of an angry crowd. Hossain demonstrates how even a complaint, when creatively orchestrated can be a 'relatively powerful weapon' (Ibid: 914). These forms of negotiation do not serve to improve institutional performance, or the rules by which resources are distributed, but represent idiosyncratic and opportunistic ways in which individuals and groups negotiate their status and access to resources.



While we then to be open to the diverse and subtle ways in which violence is used, we perhaps also need to be aware of how people negotiate not through violence, but around the violence capabilities of others. Indeed, it seems reasonable to suggest that people often employ non-violent means of negotiating access to resources through relationships. These resonate with some of the activities Scott defines as ‘weapons of the weak’, including ‘foot-dragging, dissimulations, false compliance, feigned ignorance, desertion, pilfering, [and] smuggling’ (Scott 2008: 34). As Bayat (2010) notes however, these are conceptualised as acts of ‘defiance’, and as therefore defensive. The emphasis on intermediation as being a means by which access is gained draws attention away from the language of ‘weapons’, and away from acts of defiance, and towards how people constructively negotiate access to resources. The idea of ‘tools’ as opposed to ‘weapon’, can be tentatively suggested as a way of conceptualising this.

The centrality of violence capabilities to intermediation suggests that the ways in which access to resources are negotiated have to grapple with this violence; perhaps directly using violence, negotiating around the violence capabilities of others, or both. Rather than draw a sharp distinction between certain strategies or forms of behaviour, the negotiation of intermediation is conceptualised here as the ‘politics of intermediation’ (Devine 1999: 252). Intermediation can be seen as the battleground for people’s struggles and strategies to improve their lives, opening up empirical questions about the forms that the politics of intermediation takes. The following section deepens an understanding of intermediation, by reflecting on how we conceptualise these relationships.

#### 2.2.2. UNDERSTANDING CLIENTELISM

Relationships between people of unequal status within LAOs are conceptualised through the notion of patron-clientelism (North et al 2009; Khan 2010b). North et al (2009: 35) write that in LAOs, people find security in ‘patronage or clientage networks’, and it is through these that people ‘usually’ also advance within society (Ibid: 37)<sup>24</sup>. More widely patron-clientelism has long been used to conceptualise relationships in a variety of contexts across the world (Scott 1972; Blok 1974; Wood 2003); and it is therefore the most prevalent and relevant concept for understanding intermediation. Because of its frequent use however, it has come to refer to a ‘wide and rich range of experiences’ (Devine 2006: 96), and in the process lost a degree of analytical clarity. To regain its relevance therefore, we need to interrogate what Davis (2005: 44) describes as the ‘black box approach’ to the concept. This section contributes to understanding relationships of intermediation by deconstructing patron-clientelism in light of the intermediation-violence connection outlined above. The section begins by problematizing how we delineate patron-client relationships, before

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<sup>24</sup> It should however be noted that North et al (2009: 35) recognise that there are a number of other organisational forms in LAOs beyond those organised along patron-client lines, though they use the term as a ‘stand-in for many types of social networks’. What these other types look like is not clarified.

examining the content and outcomes of such relationships as two routes by which we can further investigate the concept, and nuance the way we use the term.

Patron-client relationships are in basic defined as ‘asymmetric but mutually beneficial relationships of power and exchange’ (Roniger 2004: 353). Khan (2010: 10) argues that ‘any informal relationship or organization that involves individuals with different degrees of power can be broadly described as some variant of a patron-client relationship’. Similarly, he writes that ‘the goals of patrons and clients, their relative power, and the distribution of benefits they achieve can all vary widely’ (Ibid: 10). If these statement is accepted, then most if not all relationships between people of unequal statuses in LAOs can be described under this term<sup>25</sup>. By contrast, in a much earlier examination of the concept, Scott (1972: 92) argues that patron-clientelism is distinguished from other forms of relationships – such as those based on coercion or ‘formal authority’ - by its reciprocal quality, arguing it refers to ‘a special case of dyadic (two-person) ties involving a largely instrumental friendship’. He defines three further essential features of such relationships: first, that there is an inherent inequality in the exchange – a ‘debt of obligation’ binds the client to the patron. Second, they are ‘face to face’ - ‘the continuing pattern of reciprocity that establishes and solidifies a patron-client bond often creates trust and affection between the partners’ (Ibid: 94). Finally, that they are ‘diffuse, “whole-person” relationships rather than explicit, impersonal-contract bonds’ (Ibid: 95).

For Scott a defining characteristic of a patron-client relationship is that it is not based on coercion. This definition seems problematic however in light of the place that violence has in relation to social order and intermediation. According to the framework outlined above, social order is underpinned by the power for coercion that a ruling coalition is able to establish and maintain. Whether factions and individuals within factions face a degree of coercion in forming such relationships and negotiating in this way is an open question. Furthermore, in the framework developed individuals and groups depending on actors within the ruling coalition for access to resources are far more likely to face forms of coercion given the imbalance in the capability for violence. This suggests that reciprocity and coercion may be able to function together, questioning whether it is analytically useful for the absence of this characteristic to define patron-clientelism.

One way of further nuancing the use of the term is to better describe the content to the relationships highlighted. When examined in terms of democratic political systems, there has been a tendency to frame patron-client relationships in terms of resource

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<sup>25</sup> Part of the reason why the term appears to have lost its analytical teeth, are its application in rapidly changing environments. As Arias (2006: 2) argues, the term was originally developed in relation to agrarian relationships often involving landlords and workers or peasants. It seemed to give a sense of the depth to the long term and complicated relationships that emerge in such contexts. But as societies have developed, and as academic attention has shifted, the term has been continually applied to even more complicated and dynamic contexts, without significant conceptual advancements.

‘flows, exchange, [and] rational choice’ (Auyero 2000: 23). The predominant exchange has been perceived as

the distribution of resources (or promise of) by political office holders or political candidates in exchange for political support, primarily – although not exclusively – in the form of the vote (Gay 1990: 648, cited in Auyero 2000: 57).

The recognition that under LAOs, political and economic lives are ‘interlocked’ (Wood 2014) and that access to resources are mediated in order to provide benefits to a ruling coalition, necessitates attention to exchanges beyond that highlighted above<sup>26</sup>. A defining characteristic of the framework developed is that intermediation is intimately linked to the capability for violence. The bearing that violence has on people’s lives is an empirical question, however this framework suggests that violence forms part of such relationships ‘content’. Fundamental to the LAO framework is that factions have a capability for violence<sup>27</sup>. North et al (2009: 10) describe patron-clientelism in the context of factions in terms of ‘organizational support in exchange for benefits that the patron offers’. The stability of a faction, they argue, rests on the balance between patrons and clients, and the ability of the patron to mobilise their clients to ‘inflict violence on the clients of other patrons’ (Ibid: 36). This opens up questions regarding how and whether this is the case empirically, but also how violence also forms part of relationships between actors within and outside the ruling coalition.

A further way of understanding the ‘content’ to patron-clientelism is by interrogating the motivations behind such relationships. As North et al (2009: 37) state, patron-client relationships can be ‘based on kinship, ethnicity, geography, religion, criminal activity, or other factors’. Khan (2010: 11) argues that although organisationally factions may overlap with class, ethnic and kin alliances they are more fundamentally driven by a ‘rational calculation of interests by both patrons and clients’. Relationships are then conceptualised as instrumental to personal economic or political interest (Ibid). In line with earlier conceptualisations of such relationships (Scott 1972), Hickey (2013: 15) critiques such a view for having a ‘rational-actor bias’, focusing on ‘instrumental rather than value-based forms of rationality’. The risk with such understandings is that in ascribing to a particular notion of rationality, they become blind to objectives and dynamics within such relationships that sit outside this. In a similar vein, Devine (2006: 92) argues that

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<sup>26</sup> Understanding clientelism in relation to a LAOs points to a need to re-frame an understanding of political clientelism. Where party political actors have a far greater and more comprehensive role in day-to-day life (regulating business, determining security, providing access to services) the meaning of political clientelism must be equally multi-faceted. To limit political clientelism to exchange between votes and resources is to ignore the fact that it can be a political status that enables wider control over resources.

<sup>27</sup> Framing patron-clientelism in relation to factions is itself important analytically. As Devine (2006: 94) argues, the concept of clientelism has a tendency to ‘atomize clients’, neglecting how individual relationships are embedded within wider groups, networks, alliances and so forth.

Clientelism matters not only because it offers material benefits, but because it establishes a particular form of affective relationship that attends to a wider set of obligations and commitments besides the provision of goods or services.

This calls for attention to be given not only to the transactional content of such relationships but also the 'social'; not only what is exchanged but the ways in which exchanges are embedded in deeper relationships and identities. So-called 'patrons' and 'clients' may have symbolic and emotive ties – 'fictive kinship' or friendships - framed in terms of responsibility, obligation and good will. Auyero (2000) argues that building these may in fact be the root motivation for such relationships, and there is therefore a need to focus on the 'enduring webs of relationships that brokers establish with their clients, and in the – sometimes shared (although seldom cooperatively constructed) – array of cultural representations' (Ibid: 23). Attention to these identities and cultural references is in line with the concern to bring 'ideas' and 'ideology' back to analyses of politics concerned often only with 'interests' (Hickey 2013; Rodrik 2013). Even if we accept the proposition that social order rests on a ruling coalition maintaining a superior capability for violence, the interests and motivations behind actors within this coalition cannot necessarily be confined to a rational calculation of interests and material benefits.

A final way of interrogating the term patron-clientelism, is by deconstructing the negative dynamics the relationships it denotes are often understood as having. Indeed, fundamental to understanding the significance of intermediation in the lives of the poor is exploring the extent to which such relationships are 'problem solving' (Auyero 2000) and 'problem-creating'. In one sense, the concept of intermediation inherently values these relationships: people receive resources through them such as work, shelter, services and security. Clientelism itself can be understood as a 'form of bargaining' (Fox 1994: 153), representing both an outcome of a negotiation, but also a continuous negotiation, with relationships and the balance of power within them constantly changing. Furthermore, as already argued, at a societal level 'personal relationships and rent-creation provide the incentive systems that contain violence and allow cooperation in a natural state' (North et al 2012: 37). And yet the notion of clientelism, and hence highly diverse relationships, are characterised negatively as unjust, exploitative and corrupt, contrasted against relationships based on rights as citizens (Hopkins 2006).

These judgements are often based on analyses of the consequences of these relationships, understood in terms of agency. Scott (1972: 94) argues that 'affiliating with a patron is neither a purely coerced decision nor is it the result of unrestricted choice'. Though patron-client relationships can be defined by a degree of initial agency, and as bringing certain benefits – security, work, services – they are theorised by some as having longer term negative outcomes on individual agency and thus closely associated with the replication of poverty (Auyero 2000, Wood 2003, Mosse 2010). Auyero (2000: 70) argues that they reflect 'relations of clientelist domination', and more widely this point has been conceptualised as 'adverse incorporation' (Wood

2003; Hickey and du Toit 2007; Davis 2011). Wood's (2003: 455) argument of 'Faustian bargains' is the most sophisticated representation of this point, an argument most simply summarised as: 'the pursuit of immediately needed security places [the poor]... in relationships and structures which then displace the longer term prospects of a sustained improvement in their livelihoods'. As Auyero (2000: 175) argues similarly

If they [clients] resist the broker's domination, they will lose access to vital resources and thus make their already bad living conditions even worse. Resistance is therefore out of the question (and probably futile). If, on the other hand, they assimilate... [they] partake in the reproduction of the hierarchic relations prevailing in the local political arena and thus in their own subordination.

The relationships and structures through which the poor find security thus come 'at a price: of dependency and the foreclosure of autonomy. Becoming a client, in other words.' (Wood 2003: 456). Though the poor therefore find security in such relationships, this is 'dependent' rather than 'autonomous' (Wood 2007).

It can also be argued however that clientelism and agency are not the dichotomy they are often analysed to be. Devine (2006) makes this argument drawing on literature from social-psychology (Chirkov et al. 2003). Rather than preventing autonomous action, some forms of dependency may in fact be the means through which 'clients' can act autonomously and pursue their own interests. Devine's (1999, 2002, 2006) analyses of the relationship between clientelism and collective action suggests that clientelist organisation can be the basis on which collective action can promote the interests of the poor and increase their agency. More generally outside of patron-client relationships this principle has strong resonance. A simple analogy is that of the dependency a child, teenager or young adult often has on their family. The dependency is real and multi-faceted (emotional, economic), yet it is through that dependency - the reliance and the security it brings - that the child can (at least in ideal) pursue their interests and build their future. Devine et al (2008: 27) argue 'the right kind of dependency relationship can be an important and creative vehicle within which the poor can effectively exercise greater agency and autonomy'. This therefore raises the question of what constitutes the 'right kind' of dependency. It also suggests moving away from deontological assertions of moral worth, and moving towards more teleological judgements (Piliavsky and Sbriccoli 2016).

This can be examined further by asking questions about the relative power between patrons and clients, and the extent to which there is 'room for manoeuvre' (Schaffer and Lamb 1974: 82). Inter-dependency is inherent to the definition of patron-clientelism. The stability or legitimacy of the patron is contingent on the actions of clients, and the levels of relative bargaining power vary between contexts (Scott 1972). This can be seen as partly a function of the degree to which 'exit options' are available (Hirschman 1970). Gay (1998: 14), writing from a Latin American context, argues

that clientelism is ‘an increasingly voluntary, transactional and, as a result, unstable relationship between both political elites and masses’. Similarly, Hopkins (2006: 3) argues that traditional patron-client relationships have become more ‘democratic’, and though relationships are unequal the client ‘feels increasingly free to use her vote as a commodity to be exchanged for whatever maximizes her utility’. As such, these relationships are more unstable and malleable. Devine (1999: 253) writes that ‘the net effect of the mutual influence of ‘dependence’ and ‘autonomous power’, ‘clientelism’ and ‘voice’ is politically contingent and evolving, never fixed and static’. Other studies indicate a far greater sense of control by such ‘patrons’ over the communities within which they live (Johnson 2005; Arias 2006). Furthermore, Auyero (2000) argues that the term patron-clientelism should be confined to refer to the inner circles of brokers. The intensity of such relationships is determined by their proximity to the broker and in many cases outside of this, he argues, people may receive goods or services without giving loyalty, and therefore without a sufficient degree of reciprocity to merit classification through the term patron-clientelism.

In summary, this section helps guide an analysis of people’s relationships with intermediaries through critically engaging with how patron-clientelism is understood. In line with the framework of this chapter, the ‘content’ of such relationships must be understood both in relation to violence, as well as being socially embedded, and therefore their dynamics more complex than the language of ‘interests’ and ‘exchanges’ can capture. Furthermore, the actual outcomes of such dependencies in people’s lives may be complex, and we need to avoid the negative connotations that the term patron-clientelism is laden with.

### 2.3. CONCLUSION

This chapter has established the conceptual framework for this thesis by proposing a relationship between how social order is maintained and the nature of intermediation. The key link between these is how societies manage a diverse set of actors having a capability for violence. In LAOs social order is theorised as predicated on a dominant coalition forming across society on the basis of a superior capability for violence than a rival coalition. This is structured through factions organised hierarchically. Social order is dependent on these actors accruing sufficient resources to maintain their power, while at the same time limiting the access rival actors have to resources (North et al 2009). Controlling the access that other people have to resources – a phenomenon that can be termed intermediation or brokerage – is posited as an important means by which a dominant coalition maintains its viability. This suggests that intermediation, which has been studied across the world within Western social sciences since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, can be understood in relation to the capability for violence of a ruling coalition. The relationship between intermediation and violence is however one that should be demonstrated empirically, a task for subsequent chapters.

Positing a relationship between a capability for violence and the dynamics of intermediation opens up significant questions about the nature of the relationships that

people have with these intermediaries, and the means through which people negotiate access to resources. Questions regarding patron-clientelism, the dominant concept used to understand these relationships, have been posed, relating to where the concept should be applied, the content of these relationships, and the outcomes they have. It has been argued that in terms of content, greater attention should be given to the capability for violence, and how this conditions the relationship between people and intermediaries. This framework also demands attention is given to how people negotiate access through these actors, how they build relationships and negotiate the terms of these. This is the 'politics of intermediation'. The framework within which this politics is conceptualised assumes that violent factional competition is a prevalent form this politics takes, but also necessitates seeing more diverse and potentially rich ways in which people negotiate access.

### 3. INTERMEDIATION IN DHAKA CITY

*'intermediaries' (ranging from godfathers, mastans, corrupt officials, hired goons, and the like) end up holding the real power, with both MPs and the people becoming dependent on them*  
Ahmed (2004: 107)

This chapter applies the theoretical framework of violence, order and intermediation to the context of Dhaka on the basis of academic and historical sources. Given this thesis' empirical focus on the *kangali*, emphasis is placed on the condition of the urban poor and understanding the nature of intermediation from their perspective. Over the past decade or so a body of literature has emerged from urban Bangladesh arguing that poor communities are organised in complex ways, and controlled by a range of party political and violent actors who mediate access to valuable resources (Wood and Salway 2000; Banks 2008; IGS 2012; Hossain 2013; Hackenbroch and Hossain 2012; Suykens 2015; Atkinson-Sheppard 2015). This chapter questions how intermediation is understood in urban Bangladesh, setting the basis for the empirical contribution of this thesis. Two arguments are in particular advanced: first, that a broader set of actors than those often identified play important roles in the lives of the urban poor; and second, that we need to deconstruct the role that violent urban actors known as *mastan* have been argued to play in Bangladesh. Approaching the lives of the urban poor in Bangladesh through the framework developed here, furthermore poses significant questions regarding how the capability for violence is distributed in poor communities, the nature of relationships with intermediaries and how these relationships are negotiated; all questions that have to date been neglected in urban Bangladesh.

The first half of this chapter argues for the significance of labour as a way in which the urban poor are organised, and hence labour leaders as key intermediaries.

Historical sources suggest that groups of labour in Dhaka<sup>28</sup> were organised by caste and trade through a type of faction or union, known as *dal* or *panchayat*. These were led by labour leaders; often called *sardar* in Bengali. Labour leaders played important roles in the colonial state, and were contentious and ubiquitous intermediaries to whom the urban poor looked for work and security. These actors are almost entirely neglected by contemporary literature from Bangladesh, however the few recent references there indicate that they continue to play a significant role in Dhaka (Khan 2000).

The second half of this chapter critically examines the violent figure of the *mastan*, who are identified within literature as playing significant roles in poor urban communities in Bangladesh (Wood and Salway 2000; Banks 2008; IGS 2012; Suykens 2015; Atkinson-Sheppard 2015). *Mastan* have been seen as powerful intermediaries to whom the urban poor look, controlling access to services, space and work and determining people's experiences of security. Their deep connections to party politics led to conceptualisations of the Bangladeshi state as itself a 'mastanocracy'. Though often cited as significant, there is relatively little research on who these actors are or the roles they play. This chapter deepens our understanding of these actors through first, understanding them within the LAO framework (Khan 2010a, 2013) and second, by contextualising them in relation to historical understandings of urban criminality within South Asia.

### 3.1. CASTE, LABOUR AND LEADERSHIP

To understand the nature of intermediation in urban Bangladesh today it is important to appreciate how it has evolved historically. Sources available from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century draw analytical attention to how ethnic and cultural differences have intertwined with socio-economic and political structures to organise the poor. While most of these ethnic and cultural differences have now eroded, the way in which these groups were organised give insight into what was – and what some studies suggest still is – a ubiquitous intermediary and form of organisation: the labour leader and groups of organised labour. It should be acknowledged from the outset that historical sources only offer limited information as to how these groups were placed within the colonial state and how violence connects to these forms of intermediation. This section should therefore be seen as important in pointing attention to certain forms of intermediation, rather than offering clear-cut insights regarding the nature of this. As empirical chapters will demonstrate, this form of organisation is critical to understanding the lives of the urban poor in Dhaka today, as well as for understanding the dynamics of factionalism at the lowest rungs of political parties.

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<sup>28</sup> Dhaka was previously spelt as the anglicised 'Dacca'. Dacca is used here where it appears in the source quoted.



### 3.1.1. CASTE AND OCCUPATIONS

*Last year I was a Jolaha, this year I am a Shekh; next year if prices rise I shall be a Saiad*<sup>29</sup>

Bengali proverb, cited in Census of India 1901

By contrast to the 19<sup>th</sup> and much of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Dhaka today is culturally homogenous, dominated by Bengali Sunni Muslims. There are important exceptions to this including the so-called *Bihari*<sup>30</sup>, a prominent Shia community, Hindu communities distinguished by caste, as well as smaller Christian and Buddhist communities. The vast majority of urban poor people however identify as Bengali Muslims. Where people distinguish their identities from others this is more likely to be done through reference to their place of birth, their *bari*, among other factors. Prior to partition in 1947, the population of what is now Bangladesh – and thus also the urban poor – had been far more diverse. Sources from the colonial period<sup>31</sup> indicate that complex ethnic, cultural, religious and racial differences mediated people's access to the labour market, business and more generally right to participate in society (Taylor 1840, Wise 1883, Census of India 1901). This was of a magnitude not seen in Dhaka today. These differences became framed as 'caste', partly through the process of census and survey administered by the colonial state, which attempted to draw clear boundaries around more fluid and tangled identities (Samarendra 2011; Walby and Haan 2012). The term caste then captures a broad set of identities that have differing dynamics and relevance to people's lives. Underlying these identities, as across South Asia, were notions of purity and pollution, with castes of lower status generally associated with occupations connected to symbolic and physical pollution.

These identities mediated the access that both Hindus and Muslims had to the resources needed to pursue livelihoods and interests (Taylor 1840, Wise 1883, Census of India 1901). In the case of low-caste Hindus, some of the communities and dynamics continue in Dhaka today (Sultana and Subedi 2016). Some of the most

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<sup>29</sup> A *Jolaha* is a weaver, a *Shekh* refers to having Arab ancestors, and *Saiad* denotes a descendant of Mohammed.

<sup>30</sup> The groups known as *Bihari* in Bangladesh are non-Bengali Muslims from different socio-cultural backgrounds, with roots in adjacent states in India.

<sup>31</sup> This section draws on a number of colonial era sources for arguments developed here. Colonial literature should not however be drawn upon uncritically. The crude and offensive descriptions found represent an imperialist ideology, reinforce local hierarchies and reimagine them through the 'scientific' anthropology prevalent at the period (Walby and De Haan 2012). Despite this, the quasi-science they represent – surveys, classifications of occupations and groups - accompanied at times with not uninformed commentary, can offer insight into the nature of urban order. From the early 19th century two sources stand out: Henry Walter's 1830 Census of the City of Dacca (published in 1832), and James Taylor's 1840 Sketch of the Topography and Statistics of Dacca (based on his census of the city in 1838). By 1871 there is the first nation wide census, representing a more rigorous – albeit deeply flawed - attempt to document and classify human life. Perhaps more interesting than the statistics, these sources often contain sociological and ethnographic commentary, which at least offers insight into the colonial perspective at the time. In the late 19th century James Wise, the civil surgeon stationed in Dhaka district, offers one of the most detailed accounts of the social fabric of the city in his Notes on the Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal 1883. A major weakness in my historical sketch is that I am limited to English language texts.

outcast groups of urban dwellers were and are referred to as *dom*, or the ‘domra, doma, dombra, dama’ (Wise 1883: 265; Sultana and Subedi 2016). In practice this referred to people as diverse as fisherman, sweepers, and ‘pagoda slaves’ in Arakan united only by ‘their degraded position in the eyes of the people’ (Ibid: 265). These groups were held as having a lower, defiled status: ‘the presence of a Dom at any gathering of pure Hindus defiles them all’ wrote Wise (1883: 268). A similarly broad term which is still also used today is *mihtar* or *methor*, referring to people associated with waste. This was also a category employed by censuses<sup>32</sup>. Wise (1883: 338) lists disparate groups identified under the label - ‘Lalbegi, Khakrob, Bhangi, Raut, Hela, Halal-khor, Sekri, or Chuhra’. To be identified as being a *methor* indicates an association with defiled forms of work and social status, such as household or industrial waste, excrement, animal carcasses, dead bodies, and as such were associated with the streets, sewers, gutters and cemeteries.

Both Hindus and Muslims were associated with being defiled and of low caste. Through to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a common distinction is drawn (at least within the literature) between three classifications of Muslims in the Bengal – *Ashraf*, *Ajlaf* and *Arzdl* (Census of India of 1901).<sup>33</sup> *Ajlaf* implied ‘wretched’ or ‘worthless’, and incorporated groups such as the *Jolaha* (weavers), *Dhunja* (cotton-carder), *Kulu* (oil-pressers), *Kunjra* (vegetable sellers), *Hajjam* (barbers) and *Dazri* (tailors); while *Arzdl* or ‘lowest of all’ consisted of the ‘very lowest castes, such as the Haldlkhori, Lalbegi, Abdal and Bediya’ (Ibid: 439). Whether caste operated in the same way within these groups as it did within Hindu communities is debatable. Lewis (1868: 8) comments that the ‘Lower classes of Mahomedans are divided into communities according to the occupation they follow, and many of these are quite as exclusive as the Hindoo castes, in regard to marrying and eating with each other’. There are hence references to the *Hajjam*, a muslim barber, who ‘occupies one of the ‘lowest ranks, and no respectable family will associate, or intermarry, with his’ (Wise 1883: 69). Or of the Muslim butchers, previously divided between *bakri-kasai* (goat killers) and *goru-kasai* (cow killers), the latter of whom ‘were formerly regarded as a degraded race’ until recently when intermarriages between the two groups took place. Fishing was deemed ritually unclean at this period, and throughout East Bengal is associated with indigenous “tribes” (Ibid: 90). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a group of around 80 families belonging to a community of fisherman known as ‘mahi-farosh’ who were excluded from wider Muslim society. Some Muslims were implicitly associated with their low-caste Hindu roots, and despite being Muslims, retained Hindu practices. The idea that such groups were ‘remnants of semi-Hinduized aboriginal tribes’ (Ibid: 338) indicates the ambiguous associations they retained.

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<sup>32</sup> In origin the term appears to have referred to a prince, and it is possible it was therefore an ironic way of referring to the lower castes.

<sup>33</sup> *Ashraf* means noble and was used to refer to people of foreign Muslim extraction - Mughal, Turk, Arab and Pathan - the descendants of the traders and colonisers of bygone eras among whom the ‘pride of blood... amongst the Muhammadans of foreign descent is considerable’ (Ibid: 441). This source indicates it could also refer to high caste Hindu converts.

While today it is very rare to find a Hindu beggar, historically both Hindu and Muslim beggars were common in Dhaka city. In 1830 there were 101 Brahmin beggars in Dhaka City. 61 of whom were men and they lived in a total of 29 houses. Alongside these however there were 628 Muslim beggars, together constituting approximately 1.3 percent of the urban population. A sizeable proportion of these beggars were *fakir*<sup>34</sup>. As Lewis (1868: 9) writes

Fakirs are numerous in the city, and subsist principally on the bounty of the wealthy Musalman inhabitants... These idle vagabonds are in great force, more especially during the festivals of Mohurru and Ramjan

In what must be one of the earliest attempts to categorise poverty in Dhaka Taylor (1840: 316) identifies the worst off of all as the 'lame, blind and diseased, of which lepers form a large proportion'. He notes they survive by begging in the streets and are 'all truly pitiable and deserving objects of charity'. Socially stigmatised occupations associated with waste and that which is impure are familiar in Dhaka city today, as will be explored in later empirical chapters. Unlike today however, in colonial Dhaka, labourers and beggars lived alongside slaves, maintained by elite households in the city for domestic work (Taylor 1840; ILC 1841; Wise 1883).<sup>35</sup> Slaves went by different names, and *Ghulam*, or *Bhandaree* were common for Muslims and Hindus respectively (Taylor 1840: 319). Some were born into slavery, their families being tied to masters hereditarily, others sold themselves into it, while others still were captured or kidnapped and forced into work. Slavery was used as a coping strategy to deal with famine (ILC 1841), and both Taylor and Wise note the greater prevalence of slavery in East rather than West Bengal, stemming 'perhaps' from the 'frequent occurrence of destitution and distress' (Taylor 1840: 319).

Domestic slaves were seen by one author as being comparatively well treated - 'with rare exceptions he is kindly treated, and in return he regards the welfare and happiness of each member of the family as inseparable from his own' (Wise 1883: 317). Male slaves were permitted to marry, and at least on paper could be married to up to around eight female slaves who were in reality used for sex by their owners (Taylor 1840). Those sold into slavery in Dhaka were generally girls, having been 'decoyed away from their parents... under pretext of marriage... and disposed of either to public women, or to rich individuals as servants' (ILC 1841: 15)<sup>36</sup>. Wandering *fakir* were

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<sup>34</sup> *Fakir* refers to a Muslim beggar identified as having a commitment to a religious or spiritual way of life, often within a broadly Sufi tradition.

<sup>35</sup> Outside of the cities *Zamindar* often relied heavily on the labour of slaves (in this context, bonded peasants) in their estates, and it appears that in some areas a remarkably high proportion of the population were classified as such. In "Tipperah" for example they were estimated to constitute one whole quarter of the population while in Sylhet they were estimated to be one third (1841: 8-9). Interestingly there appear to have been very clear concentrations of 'slavery' within the Bengal. In contrast to Tipperah or Sylhet, in "Rajeshahy" they were seen to constitute between two and three sixteenths of the population.

<sup>36</sup> The slave trade was however international. It seems that at least by the late 18th century 'Dacca and its neighbourhood furnished the greatest number of the children whom the low Portuguese of Dacca, Calcutta... used to purchase and collect clandestinely, and export by sea' (1841: 18).

identified as some of these tricksters.<sup>37</sup> Some girls were later ‘disposed of’ to prostitutes in Dhaka (Taylor 1840), where sex work was common. Allen (1912: 60) wrote that ‘prostitutes are to be found in every bazar and in considerable numbers in Dacca city’. Brothels were plentiful, and ‘not unfrequently the scenes of assaults, thefts and homicides’ (Taylor 1840: 282).

In the case of all of these groups of urban poor, sources portray caste identities as maintaining severe restrictions around social interaction and people’s life possibilities, but also as evolving, being ambiguous, and being transcended, as the quote at the beginning of this section indicates. Referring to caste/occupation groups, the author of the Census of India 1901 wrote that a

member of one such group cannot ordinarily gain admission to another, and he retains the designation of the community in which he was born even if he abandons its distinctive occupation and takes to other means of livelihood (Census of India 1901: 441).

Identities necessitated following strict social rules. The Lalbegi, who were mentioned earlier, self-identified as Muslims and yet ate pork and were not circumcised. They ‘dare not enter a public mosque’ (Wise 1883: 339), they followed Hindu festivals such as Diwali, and were not allowed to be buried in Muslim graveyards, resorting to bury their dead in jungle and waste space. Similarly, the Census of India (1901: 439) describes the Muslim ‘Haldikhor, Lalbegi, Abdal and Bediya, with whom no Muhammadan would associate, and who are forbidden to enter the mosque or to use the public burial ground’. Centuries of ‘caste violence’ across South Asia have demonstrated how the boundaries to caste groups access to resources are enforced through the violence of higher castes, often drawing on the apparatus of the state.

Alongside this however, ‘caste’ groups also worked in diverse occupations, a fact likely related to the comparatively diverse and dynamic nature of the urban economy. Labourers for example had diverse roots. The 1830 census testifies to this, noting the 10 khettri coolie, 208 Sudra Kayat coolie, 235 Kandu coolie and the 1678 muslims. These would have serviced the city’s transport terminals (at the time most notably *sadarghat* in old Dhaka), as well as the city’s many bazars. The Kandu, apparently came from Damdaha, Purneah (Wise 1883) in modern day Bihar, and as well as coolies, worked as ‘confectioners... watchmen, [and] domestic servants’. There is also reference to the *dosad* or *dosadh*, a ‘semi-Hinduized aboriginal tribe’ with fifteen or so families in Dhaka, working as ‘house bearers, syces, pankha coolies, and porters’ (Ibid: 269). Slaves were not necessarily tied for life, and on the death of their masters some found other work – ‘in Dacca [they] are employed as confectioners, coolies, brasiers, shopkeepers, and venders of Pan and Indian hemp’ (Ibid: 317)<sup>38</sup>. In the early

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<sup>37</sup> It is possible that some form of slave market had existed previously in Dacca, though no reference has been found. The most noted was in Hooghly, north of modern day Kolkata in West Bengal.

<sup>38</sup> More generally history documents many examples of slave eunuchs who have become famous and powerful, rising up in the courts of their masters. An example from the Bengal who will also be

20<sup>th</sup> century Allen (1912: 65) writes that the vast majority of Muslims belong to the same caste and ‘therefore approach the condition where there is no such thing as caste at all’. These indicate that even for the lower classes and castes there was a degree of mobility, of movement between occupations, and processes by which older mediating identities eroded. The next section examines how these groups of people were linked into the wider state through intermediary actors and group structures.

### 3.1.2. LABOUR, *SARDAR* AND THE STATE

*The sirdars are the real masters of men*  
Royal Commission on Labour in India 1929<sup>39</sup>

In historic Dhaka, as across South Asia, the occupational and caste groups described above were often hierarchically structured, led by a leader who situated the group in relation to wider society and the colonial state. Working through some form of group and leader was a key form of intermediation that the urban poor experienced. The British utilised and institutionalised labour leaders more generally within industries and agriculture, and hence they are often described as a critical ‘intermediary’ of the colonial state. Studies from contemporary Bangladesh rarely highlight the significance of labour leaders and groups, however the few studies that do, indicate that they are still a prevalent and important figure in the lives of the poor (Bertocci 1970; Wood 1994; Khan 2000).

Systems of labour, caste and occupational group leadership have deep historical roots. Writing of nearby Bihar, Chatterjee (1996: 57) argues that long before the British came, systems of leadership within trades had emerged, often called ‘chaudhuri, mistri, or dangriya’, existing within ‘every trading, artisan or carrier group’ – from butchers to barbers to porters and scavengers – most notably in urban centres. These headmen were elected to lead *panchayats*, translated by this author as ‘professional organisations’. As leaders they would receive a ‘certain commission on all goods sold, or services rendered’ (Ibid: 58) but be responsible for the management of the group. They acted as intermediaries between the workers and the government – paying ‘tributes’ to the administration and informing them of the condition of workers.

The 1901 Census of India refers to *panchayat* as being drawn along ‘caste’ boundaries, as well as ‘functional groups’. In the context of Muslims in Bengal they note the ‘striking point of resemblance’ between Hindu castes and Muslim ‘functional groups’ in that ‘they have the same system of caste management’ (Census of India 1901: 339). The purpose of such *panchayat* was to both manage the group, as well as to represent them within the wider society. The census author notes that the ‘panchayat takes cognizance of all breaches of caste custom in respect of trade, religion or morality’ (Ibid: 440). This meant ensuring people maintained customs regarding food

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referenced later is Khwaja Ambar, the chief eunuch of Shaista Khan, the 17th century Mughal governor of the Bengal.

<sup>39</sup> cited in Chakrabarty (2000: 96).

consumption, and interaction (such as smoking the *hukka*) with people from other castes. They restricted members from doing work that is of a lower, and sometimes even higher, status. They regulated within trade competition - 'no member of a caste may endeavour to oust another from any employment he has obtained, by offering to do the work for a lower wage or otherwise' - and also organised trade strikes (Ibid: 440).

In Dhaka two *panchayat* systems existed – the first was as above, organising people of specific castes or trades, and the second was an area based system for managing Dhaka's Muslim community. The Census of India (1901: 439) notes that in the case of Muslim communities of Dhaka the institution of *panchayat* was also referred to as *matbar*. Wise (1883: 262) refers to these trade and caste based *panchayat* through the language of "unions", which he clarified was his translation of the Bengali term *dal*. The term *dal* today often has explicitly factional connotations, and the brief descriptions that can be found of these *dal* in historic Dhaka, also indicate that people of the same caste and trade were factionally divided. The Hindu spice or medicine dealers for example had 'six powerful dals, or unions, in Dhaka city, the Dalpatis, or head-men being persons of great respectability' (Ibid: 272). The Hindu pottery and brick makers - *Kumar* - had two 'dals, or trade unions, one known as Islampur, the other as Bhagalpur<sup>40</sup>... the headman is styled Paramanik' (Ibid: 334), while the Hindu garland makers – the *malakara* - had two unions in Dhaka. The group of outcast Muslim fisherman living in Dhaka mentioned earlier, the *mahi-farosh*, were often organised into a 'union or dal, presided over by a Paramanik' (Wise 1883: 90). The Hindu washers – the *dhobi* - had no 'permanent union (Dal); but whenever disputes arise, or their interests are endangered, they quickly form one, reserving for such occasions a headman, or Para-manik' (Ibid: 262).

Different terminology is in use here, but all with similar meanings<sup>41</sup>. Leading one of these *dal*, or *panchayat*, was a powerful position, and as such was 'much coveted' (Census of India 1901: 440)<sup>42</sup>. At least one of these went on to become a trade union registered with the government under the Trade Unions Act of 1926, the 'Dacca district scavengers union'<sup>43</sup>. Alongside these trade and caste based *panchayat*, sat the *panchayat* that represented the Muslim communities by their wards, or *mahalla*, a system common across South Asia. Each *mahalla* was represented through a *panchayat*, led by five elder (male) community members who themselves were led by a *sardar* (Ahmed 2010: 19). All Muslims except the *Ashraf* recognised its authority and the *sardar* from each *mahalla* met together. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century they served as

<sup>40</sup> It is possible Islampur refers to the area in current day old Dhaka, while Bhagalpur referring to a city in Bihar.

<sup>41</sup> A 'pramānik' is defined in John Shakespear's dictionary (1834: 403) as '(in Bengal) a chief of a tribe among the inferior castes'. 'Dalpati' according to a Hindi-English dictionary is 'chief or leader of a team, a captain' (Allied Chambers transliterated Hindi-Hindi-English dictionary 1993).

<sup>42</sup> Lewis (1868: 10) notes that among the Hindus the president is designated differently according to caste – he is 'styled "Dālpātī" among the Brahmins, "Paramanick" among the weavers, goldsmiths, barbers &c., "Mukia" among the Tepālis'.

<sup>43</sup> Note that the term scavenger refers to what today are often called *sweeper*.

conduits for the collection of income tax for the colonial revenue collection board, instead of local government institutions (Census of India 1901).

The term *sardar* referenced above was a common way of referring to an important and prevalent actor in the lives of the lower classes in colonial India. Taylor writes of the 300 street *coolie* in Dhaka in the 1840s

who belong to the districts of Purneah and Bhagulpore. This class of people have been settled here for about 150 years; they live in sets, each consisting [of] twenty persons under the orders of a sirdar, who regulates their work, and divides their earnings among them at the end of the month. (Taylor 1840: 311)

*Sardar* or *sirdar*, is a way of referring to a ‘headman’ (Wise 1883: 83), or foreman, a low level labour leader who has responsibility for a small group of manual workers. In Hindustani ‘sar-dār’ can be defined as a ‘chief, a head man, commander’ (Shakespeare 1834: 1065). ‘Sardār-ī’ is then ‘chiefship, supremacy, domination, lordship, rule’ (Ibid: 1065). Through the sub-continent there are a range of other terms used to describe leaders of broadly the same role. Discussing the labour at docks for example, ‘shipping companies... employ foremen, known variously as *tindals*, *mukkadams*, gang *maistries*, *jemadars*, *joliwalas*, or *sardars*’ (RCLI 1931: 185). These were referred to in colonial discourse as ‘jobbers’, the now antiquated English term for brokers or middlemen. The institutionalisation of their role within industries in India is referred to as the ‘jobber system’ (Chandavarkar 2008).

Through drawing on broader literature it is possible to comment on the likely situation of labourers in Dhaka city. From the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial administrators institutionalised the role of jobbers within sectors that required organised labour. *Sardar* or a variant of them could therefore be found in tea plantations, mines and factories, but also in bazars and transport terminals such as train stations and ports. They were ubiquitous ‘intermediaries between employer and employee’ (RCLI 1931: 23), and it can be assumed they would have been present in the bazars, terminals and factories of Dhaka, and also among the city’s sweepers. The rationale for their introduction and promotion by the colonial state was the perception of Indian labour as ‘sedentary and overly mobile; difficult to recruit and impossible to control; incapable of organisation, yet averse to work discipline’ (Chandavarkar 2008: 125). In many industries *sardar*, who were originally ordinary workers, were sent out to recruit labour from within their networks of kinship, caste and home village.

He is not, however, merely responsible for the worker once he has obtained work; the worker has generally to approach him to secure a job, and is nearly always dependent on him for the security of that job as well as for a transfer to a better one... they may finance him [the worker] when he is in debt and he may even be dependent on them for his housing’ (RCLI 1931: 23)

The *sardar* benefitted financially not only from a recruitment fee that they usually earned from their employer, but they often also demanded a fee from the employee to gain work. Further, ‘in many cases a small regular payment has also to be made out of each month’s wages’ (Ibid: 24). Referring to extortion of workers by *sardar*, the Royal Commission on Labour in India 1931 notes that ‘it is said that even members of the supervising staff sometimes receive a share of the bribe’ (Ibid: 24). Combined with the benefits from providing other services such as credit and housing, they were portrayed as having an exploitative hold on the workers, as being an ‘evil’ force (RCLI: 24). ‘The clutches’ of the jobbers ‘keep him [the worker] in permanent bondage’ (Burnett-Hurst 1925: 48, cited in Chandavarkar 2008: 126-127). The power that these *sardar* had to exploit workers was perceived as resting not only on their structural position in relation to wider industries and the state, but also their direct capability for violence (Chakrabarty 1983; de Haan 1997; Chakrabarty 2000; Sen 2002; Bhattacharya 2004). Sen (2002: 3957) wrote that ‘the threat of physical violence played an important role in the exercise of authority on the part of the sardars’. Some *sardar* were also local ‘dadas’ (meaning elder brother), having a status as being violence specialists in the local area, running gymnasium and running extortion networks, and utilised by factory owners to control the workers (Sen 2002). These sources describe the capability for violence of the *sardar* more in terms of direct physical violence, rather than as being indirect by drawing upon wider forms of authority. The potential for violence was then an important part of the authority that *sardar* maintained over workers, and that was instrumental to the colonial state maintaining control in economic settings<sup>44</sup>. Indeed, as colonial control weakened in the late 1930s, the power of *sardar* within Indian industries weakened (Gooptu 2001).

Whether this is an appropriate characterisation of the *sardar* as an intermediary is however disputed (Sen 2010; Chandavarkar 2008; Bates and Carter 2016). Rather than seeing jobbers as ‘monolithic and homogenous’ (Chandavarkar 2008: 136), they were arguably ‘heterogeneous’ (Ibid: 141). There were ‘head jobbers’ as well as ‘lower jobbers’ (Ibid: 142). Sources from Dhaka cite ‘head-sardar’, ‘sardar’ and ‘sub-sardar’, with reference to municipal waste workers (The Municipal Office, Dacca, 1969). It is furthermore important to acknowledge the likelihood of differences between the management of caste groups and the management of labour within wider markets however. Labour leaders could be found in widely different forms of industry and service, from train stations to factories to mines. This means they often operated within ‘a larger managerial hierarchy’ (Chandavarkar 2008: 144), the dynamics of which differed. In the case of cotton mills for example ‘authority was diffused and lodged at various levels’ such that ‘there were competing locations of power and alternative sources of patronage to which workers could turn’ (Ibid: 144). Similarly outside of work – where jobbers were seen as extending their power base - ‘the proliferation and

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<sup>44</sup> In the rural context, it has been argued the colonial state attempted to maintain order through improving the condition of the ‘intermediate’ class of rural landowners, the jotedar (Khan 2010a). It is possible that *sardar* – though lower hierarchically than jotedar – played a similar structural role in maintaining the power of the colonial state in the urban context, within industry and large agriculture.



rivalry of patrons was always liable to increase the options before the workers and afford them a measure of protection at the very point at which the benefactor appeared to enslave them' (Ibid: 136).

Competition between *sardar*, and between other intermediaries playing the broader roles that *sardar* often played, increased the overall exit options available to labour. Taylor (1840: 314), for example, writes of Dhaka that 'almost every person engaged in business in the town is a pawnbroker', requiring borrowers to pay interest of around 2.5 to 6 percent a month. A jobber's legitimacy was often contingent on their ability to provide access not only to work, but also these wider goods (housing and credit for example). As Bates and Carter (2016: 10) write of *sardar* in overseas colonies,

it was not uncommon for them to retain a portion of the monthly wages of their labourers as a form of saving. This could then be returned when the labourer wished to remit money home or to go back to India, or if a labourer was ill or absent and his wage was docked, that portion of the past retained by the sirdar would then be used to provide him with support.

But in certain contexts, in providing these wider goods they opened themselves to wider competition with locals, and had to situate themselves within the 'moral economy of the neighbourhood' (Chandavarkar 2008: 144). Jobbers could be undermined by those below them, and as such 'had to remain responsive to the needs and expectations of the workers' (Ibid: 141), and were therefore vulnerable. Similar to the sense of change and flexibility alongside clear caste boundaries, is then also the sense that the relationship with key intermediaries were also heterogeneous and shifting.

These forms of intermediation described above are deeply related and cannot be easily disentangled. People of the same caste and occupation were organised as groups, led by leaders referred to in different ways and undoubtedly playing subtly different roles according to the demands and requirements of different communities and industries. Given the presence of different *dal* within the same caste or occupation, there is a sense that factions existed in historic Dhaka. Leaders situated and linked groups to wider society and the colonial state. A significant part of this relationship was the payment of tax and the collection of revenues. LAOs are built on a ruling coalition accruing resources. The actors that this includes in rural contexts are well documented, and were dominated by the landlords, the *zamindar*, described by Baden-Powell in 1899 as the 'great middleman'. Under the Mughals and later East India Company<sup>45</sup> and British Crown, a sophisticated and comprehensive tax system regulated life. Much of this was orientated around key points of exchange such as 'gunges, ghauts and bazars' where 'duties or customs [were] levied upon almost every article of life, and of imposts on trades, professions and personal property' (Taylor 1840: 197-198).

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<sup>45</sup> By the late 18th century all lands belonging to the Mughal government in the city of Dacca were transferred to the East India Company, and administered under the Board of Revenue in Calcutta (Taylor 1840: 205).

There were sales taxes on items from hookahs to looking glasses and combs, ‘for a goat, 1 to 2 annas were charged in the rupee: elephants and horses at the rate of 5 per cent’. An annual tax on vegetable sellers was levied, weighted to their sales<sup>46</sup>.

Whether in Dhaka these systems of taxation extended down to the labourers through their leaders, their *sardar*, or any of the various associations is an interesting question without a clear answer. It is known that some people could be excluded from tax obligations due to poverty (Taylor 1830: 165). It should also be noted that with the brief introduction of an income tax in the 1860s, tax was paid collectively through *panchayat* rather than as individuals. Separate *panchayat* were institutionalised for the collection of the *chaukidari* tax (night watchmen)<sup>47</sup>. Writing more generally of the tax system, Taylor (1840: 197-198) argues that ‘the rate of assessment and mode of collection were not well defined, and being in most cases left to the uncontrolled management of renters and their subordinates, these taxes were generally very arbitrary and oppressive’.

The structure and place of organised labour, as well as the figure of the labour leader, the *sardar*, have largely disappeared from contemporary studies from Bangladesh. In the urban context, the only source that does include analysis of them (Khan 2000), highlights the significant role that they continue to play in mediating people’s access to work and wider resources. Khan references the continued role that *sardar* play in mediating access to work, and also bringing labour groups from rural areas into the city. Similar to the account from colonial India, he writes that ‘many wage labourers have to pay the sardars... an amount of their earning and accept any sort of work the sardar offers’ (Ibid: 42). His analysis however also highlights the relationship that these *sardar* have to a more powerful actor in the urban context – the *mastan* – writing that ‘the labour gangs are directly controlled by violent gangs either through their members or through their trustworthy nominees’ (Khan 2000: 188), suggesting a new intermediary structure in which labour leaders operate today. While the *sardar* themselves have also been understood as having a capability for violence, since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century a more violent and entrepreneurial set of actors have been identified as playing extremely significant roles in the lives of the urban poor. These are explored in the second half of this chapter.

### 3.2. PARTY POLITICS AND VIOLENCE SPECIALISTS

Alongside labour leaders are a set of violent actors, both independent and interconnected with organised labour, who have played significant roles in the context

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<sup>46</sup> The importers and sellers of marijuana and opium were also taxed. By the mid 19th century there were over 20 opium shops in the city, as well as five licensed distilleries making fermented rice based drinks (Wise 1883). Further back, in ‘1793 the importers of ganjah paid a tax (Koot Mehal) of Rs. 2-4 per maund, and the venders of it in the city, a duty varying from two annas to one rupee per month’ (Taylor 1840: 209). A more obscure form of tax was known as ‘Chundeena Dumdaree. A tax on bear, monkey, and snake dancers, on bird catchers, singers, fakirs and conjurers’ (Taylor 1840: 201).

<sup>47</sup> The position of nightwatchman may have reduced crime of one sort, but it also gave the 759 men initially recruited, the power to extort (Ibid: 158-159). Ahmed (2010: 36) notes that ‘it was repeatedly alleged that the *chaukidari* panchayats were a den of lowly and selfish people’.

of the lives of the poor in early 20<sup>th</sup> century urban Bengal and current day Bangladesh. While the vocabulary used to identify and refer to these actors differs, they are united in occupying similar structural positions within the urban environment, and in being ‘violence specialists’ (Tilly 2003). Indeed, a capability for violence should be seen as the defining characteristic of these actors, and the basis on which they have gained authority and the ability to play broader roles in the lives of the urban poor and wider society. In Bangladesh *mastan* have been identified as powerful and dangerous intermediaries on whom both the urban poor and party politicians depend; while historically *goonda* were understood in very similar ways in wider Bengal. This section proposes understanding these actors as different expressions of the same phenomenon and examines their role in relation to the LAO framework. In so doing this section points to a significant lack of detail in understanding who these actors are and how people relate to them.

### 3.2.1. THE RULING COALITION, *GOONDA* AND *MASTAN*

The social order of what is now Bangladesh has changed significantly in the post-Colonial period, and under the various governments seen in the country since independence in 1971; and the ruling coalition on which social order rests has incorporated a range of different actors (Khan 2010a). Through the 1990s and early 2000s academic studies of poor communities in Dhaka pointed to the prevalence of a dangerous figure known primarily through the Bengali term *mastan*. A striking feature of contemporary research from urban Bangladesh has been the close association between intermediation and violence. The *mastan* have been portrayed as controlling access to services, running extortion networks and being closely tied to party politics. Despite their perceived importance, there has been very little detailed analysis of who precisely these figures are, and how or why they have the power they do. This section examines these figures through the LAO framework and Bangladesh’s recent history (Khan 2010a; Hassan 2013). In so doing it attempts to explain why these actors have emerged and gained the power they are renowned for. The core explanation proposed lies in the dynamics of party political competition (Devine 2007) under ‘competitive clientelism’ (Khan 2010a). The posited relationship between violence, party politics and *mastan*, also suggests that rather than being unique or new, the *mastan* phenomenon is a more recent incarnation of the dynamics expressed through the similar term *goonda* from early 20<sup>th</sup> century Bengal.

Since at least the late 1980s *mastan* have been identified by both academics and the media in Bangladesh as being powerful in urban areas (Abdullah 1991; Siddiqui et al 1993; Wendt 1997; Khan 2000; Wood 2000; Ahmed 2004; Sobhan 2004; Banks 2008; IGS 2012; Hossain 2013; Hackenbroch and Hossain 2012; Ruud 2014; Suykens 2015; Atkinson-Sheppard 2015; Banks 2016). The term *mastan* is translated differently into English. Bangladeshis very often portray it as meaning ‘muscle man’, some use the term ‘hoodlum’ (Siddiqui et al 1993) or a ‘strong man’ (Khan 2000), and English language media often writes of ‘thug’ and ‘goon’. ‘*Mastani*’ is a common way of

describing violent crime such as hijacking or extortion (Devine 2007). Van Schendel (2009: 252) describes these *mastan* as such:

The archetypal *mastan* is young, urban, armed and testosterone-charged. He acts officiously as the leader of a locality, pushing aside respected elders and appointed authorities. An upstart, he rules through fear...

Earlier references portray *mastan* as a low-level source of insecurity, as perpetrators of sexual violence, as robbers, extortionists and hired muscle for politicians (Siddiqui et al 1993), but by the late 1990s and early 2000s they had become emblematic of a corrupt political system. One prominent commentator described their presence in society as representing the ‘criminalisation of politics’ (Sobhan 2004). Others took it a step further, writing of Bangladeshi society itself as a ‘*mastanocracy*’ (Ahmed 2004), or as having a ‘*mastan* structure’ (Khan 2000; Ahmed 2004; Devine 2007; Wood 2014). Today, *mastan* are still portrayed as both ingrained and ubiquitous in Bangladeshi society. One author writes that they are an ‘inescapable feature of street-level political life’ (Ruud 2014: 304).

The power of *mastan* is often understood as stemming from their party political functions, including serving as muscle for personal protection, mobilising labour and support for political events and campaigns (Khan 2000; Ahmed 2004; Sobhan 2004; Banks 2008; Devine 2007), and even providing vote banks. As such, they are seen as holding a unique ‘strategic role’ (Ahmed 2004: 101) or ‘structural position’ (Devine 2007: 21), on which politicians are dependent. In the late 1990s they were portrayed in the media as such

Mastans are able to sustain because of the various vested interest groups of the society. Whether the cause is political, commercial or personal, there is invariably a constant demand for mastans in the society (The Daily Star, 10 June 1999<sup>48</sup>)

Khan’s (2010a; 2013) application of the LAO framework in Bangladesh helps to better theorise why these figures emerged so significantly in the late 1980s and 1990s. For Khan (2010: 12) factions competing and included in the ruling coalition range ‘from neighbourhood groups led by petty mafia bosses known in Bangladesh as *mastans* to village factions led by somewhat more respectable *mattabars*, *dalals* and *upazila* chairmen’. *Mastan* are perceived as emerging in the urban context during a period in which Bangladesh experienced significant political change. Following the ‘Father of the Nation’ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s failed attempt to build a ‘populist authoritarian’ one party state (Khan 2013), and his assassination in 1975, the country’s subsequent leaders - President Rahman and then President Ershad - relied on bringing a broader set of actors alongside the military into the ruling coalition in order to maintain social

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<sup>48</sup> Cited in ‘Responses to Information Requests (RIRs), Bangladesh: Information on goons/thugs/mastans, and the nature of their relationship to political and police authorities (1998-2003)), Immigration and Refugee Board, Government of Canada

order. As Khan (2013: 29) writes, the ‘new clientelist logic was to selectively include enough political organizers in the dominant coalition to minimize the required threat of force to an acceptable level’. During Ershad’s rule people formed organisations under different political guises in order to demonstrate their ‘holding power’ and therefore legitimate claim to inclusion in the ruling coalition, however as long as Ershad retained control of the military and bureaucracy the ‘top job’ remained his (Ibid: 19). Referring to the late 1980s Abdullah (1991: 98) wrote of the “*mastanisation*” of urban local level politics’, suggesting that there is a connection between the emergence of urban *mastan* gangs and the need for a wider set of actors to be included in the ruling coalition.

Following the toppling of Ershad and the return to a form of parliamentary democracy however, the strongest political parties that had emerged through Bangladesh’s history competed for the ability to form a new ruling coalition. Two parties dominated: the Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman; and the BNP, led by Khaleda Zia, the wife of a former President Ziaur Rahman. The means by which these parties competed in the early 1990s and since has been through demonstrating their ‘organizational power’ on the ground to mobilise people, inflict violence on others, and enable stability (Khan 2013: 29). The competition between these two parties, and the networks of factions they represent, constitutes ‘competitive clientelism’ (Khan 2010; 2013)<sup>49</sup>. In a society where political parties compete to establish the ruling coalition, the capability for violence is needed at the grassroots. Indeed, arguably elections are not processes which primarily judge the interests and ideology of voters, but rather where ‘the organizational strengths of the competing clientelist coalitions are revealed’ (Khan 2013: 60). Within this model, *mastan* are a means by which political parties compete (Devine 2007), and are thus included in the network of actors that together constitutes a ruling coalition. While there has been little direct research into the *mastan*, the work that there is has pointed to the complicated and multifarious relationships between party politics and these actors (Devine 2007; Ruud 2014). For Devine (2007: 23), though *mastan* are legitimised by political networks, the actual control over them by political leaders is ‘neither dominant nor comprehensive’, and they can therefore be understood as having a reasonable degree of independence or entrepreneurialism, competing with other groups of *mastan* and switching political allegiances. While intimately connected, *mastan* are thus conceptualised as distinct from party political leaders (Khan 2000; Hossain 2012).

The emergence of *mastan* from the 1980s has been portrayed as a ‘unique’ development in Bangladesh’s history (Ahmed 2004), distinct from other criminals

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<sup>49</sup> According to Khan’s analysis, under a LAO defined by competitive clientelism, either party has the potential to win elections. Political organisations can be formed to ‘challenge the ruling coalition’ and businesses can be established without the direct support of the ruling coalition (Khan 2013: 30). Nonetheless ‘the operation of organizations still requires assistance from political and state actors that has to be “purchased” on a personalized basis’, in order for ‘support or non-intervention’ (Ibid: 6).

such as the *cadre* or *goonda*<sup>50</sup>. Framing *mastan* in terms of a LAO, and understanding them as serving as a means by which others compete to demonstrate their superior capability for violence, suggests that they are a more modern expression of a phenomenon that can be traced back through to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Bengal when a distinct and new violent and urban figure – the *goonda* – emerged within public and government discourse (Ghosh 1991; Das 1994; Chakrabarty 2000; Sen 2002; Bhattacharya 2004; Nandi 2010). Based on historical analysis of police records in Calcutta, Das (1994: 2880) describes the *goonda* as involved in a wide range of crimes such as ‘snatching, extortion, theft, murder, robbery, dacoities, wagon-breaking, smuggling, gambling and blackmarketeering’. Some *goonda* had been doormen, some *sardar* (Chakrabarty 2000; Bhattacharya 2004), and some from the middle class. Certain *goonda* were identified as wealthy individuals (Bhattacharya 2004), from diverse backgrounds, even Anglo-Indians and a Chinese man in the case of Calcutta (Das 1994). The *goonda* were identified as a unique form of criminal, though what actually defined them as unique was contested (Nandi 2010). It is certainly clear that Calcutta was not unfamiliar with organised crime. The 18<sup>th</sup> century had for example, seen the presence of what Banerjee (2003: 2047) calls ‘urban dacoity’, gangs of men numbering into their hundreds, hiding in nearby jungles, sometimes including Europeans, who robbed the city’s elite. While these urban dacoits had long since been suppressed, the *goonda* were seen as distinct for qualities that paralleled those given to dacoits: they combined the capability for violence with brazenness, and were therefore particularly dangerous. As such they were distinct from the *badmash*, the ordinary urban criminals. As Nandi (2010: 37) writes, ‘*goonda* meant an archetypal urban criminal, unfettered by social mores and given to ferocious violence’<sup>51</sup>.

*Goonda* led ‘goonda gangs’ (Nandi 2010) that were more based on skills than home district or caste identities. Indeed, these gangs were particularly associated with migrants, and as a space in which poor people from diverse backgrounds could find opportunities. These gangs were often labelled as clubs, based from ‘local gymnasia and physical training centres’ (Das 1994: 2880), and were in competition with other groups for local power. In a similar way to *mastan*, they are understood as having ‘dominated life in working-class *bustis* (slums) and bazaars’ (Chakrabarty 2000: 110). They were identified as particularly involved in prostitution, and indeed one explanation for the rise of *goonda* is the opportunities to regulate increased levels of prostitution after the influx of American soldiers during World War II (Ghosh 1991: 4; Das 1994: 2880). A further reason why *goonda* were understood as having emerged

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<sup>50</sup> Contrasting *mastan* with other labels for violent criminals, Ahmed (2004: 100) writes that while *goonda* are professional killers or the *cadre* are ‘underground party members who own arms’ the *mastan* are ‘unique’. Devine (2007: 21) distinguishes *mastan* against the shontrash, while Ahmed (2004: 102) appears to equate *mastan* and *shontrash*. The label *shontrash* is often translated into English as terrorist, but it perhaps has more the connotations of outlaw and gangster than terrorist. For Ahmed (2004: 102) the *mastan* are not only the armed and violent criminals, but also ‘represent an ‘unarmed’ intermediary group providing institutions and administration who extorts money through extra-legal operations’.

<sup>51</sup> The extent to which the identification and legislation around *goonda* was a response to the emergence of a new form of criminality has however be questioned. Nandi (2010) argues that it rather reflected elite fears around hooliganism, which were by then well established within an urban European context.

in this period – and a defining characteristic of their identities – was their close connection to politics. As Bhattacharya (2004: 4281) writes, the

skill of producing violence was a skill that was as much in demand as that of a lawyer and expertise in this skill brought the ‘subaltern’ of the city in close proximity of the ‘elite’ political and industrial bosses.

Bhattacharya (2004: 4278) argues that it was partly the involvement of *goonda* in the non-cooperation movement that motivated ‘The Goondas Act’ of 1923 for West Bengal, which empowered the police to identify and deport *goonda* without trial (Nandi 2010)<sup>52</sup>. While these *goonda* were therefore perceived as in opposition to the colonial state, they also often maintained links with lower level administrators and the police. This connection to politics appears to have continued and strengthened such that *goonda* later played extremely significant roles as defenders and perpetrators of communal violence between Hindus and Muslims (Ghosh 1991; Das 1994). Indeed, these ‘links with institutional politics’ (Das 1994: 2878) enabled some *goonda* to avoid prosecution.

*Goonda* were also identified as problematic in Dhaka. A letter from the President of the Dacca District Scavengers’ Union on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1943 for example describes the ‘pro-fascist goondas’ sabotaging activities in Dhaka. Similarly, in a letter from 1943, the Inspector-General of Police for Bengal laments the lack of a Detective Department in Dacca, the main drawback of which he describes is the lack of ‘direct touch with the goonda type of criminal’ which he identifies as ‘primarily responsible’ for the ‘communal clashes’ seen in the city. Later, just prior to independence, there is a reference to ‘Gundas’ attacking the *methors* (waste workers) in ‘Ganaktuly’ preventing them from going to work (Municipal Office, Dacca 1970). What lies behind these references is unclear, though it can be assumed that the functions and roles of *goonda* in Dhaka to some degree resembled those of Calcutta.

What this suggests is that the *goonda* of Bengal and more recently *mastan* of Dhaka are different expressions of an underlying phenomenon where a capability for violence at the lowest levels of urban society becomes instrumental to wider actors, networks and coalitions, such as a factory owner needing to control workers or a political party demonstrating its strength. Where actors within a ruling coalition become dependent on them to maintain and demonstrate a capability for violence, there is therefore a sense in which they become part of that ruling coalition, and that they are able to take on a far greater degree of power and status within society. They may grow within political regimes, but there is some evidence to suggest that - in line with the LAO framework – they retain a degree of independence, switching allegiances as they seek opportunities (Devine 2007).

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<sup>52</sup> Equivalent legislation in Bangladesh is the ‘Control of Disorderly and Dangerous Persons (Goondas) Act’ of 1954.

### 3.2.2. MASTAN AND THE URBAN POOR

The party political value of *mastan* is seen as giving a degree of protection from the police and law or the possibility of collusion with them. This, as well as their capability for violence, is understood as enabling them to control resources and act as intermediaries between poor communities, the state and party politics. The roles this includes are diverse. Hence *mastan* have been identified as running protection rackets, appropriating resources such as land, and operating illegal businesses. Devine (2007: 23) describes *mastan* as conducting ‘petty theft, operating informal protection rackets among local businessmen, highjacking and collecting informal tolls’. Lewis and Hossain (2008: 41) write similarly of the ‘informal *mastaan* culture of extortion that characterises local politics’. They have also been described as sheltering thieves, drug dealers and gambling, in exchange for money (Khan 2000). Banks (2008: 369) describes a further role: this ‘interaction exchanges a vote bank that is mobilized by the *mastaan* in return for improved services or other benefits from elected officials’. They have been portrayed as mediating access to services such as water, gas and electricity, as well as controlling land, community institutions and employment opportunities. More recently it has been argued that the *mastan* operate as representatives for concerned parties in *bosti* land disputes (Suykens 2015), that they are ‘enforcers’ for local leaders (Banks 2016), and also that they use street children in their illegal activities (Atkinson-Sheppard 2015)<sup>53</sup>. Interpreted within a LAO framework, mediating the access that others have to resources is not only a power that these actors enjoy, but fundamental to how they maintain their capability for violence.

*Mastan* are acknowledged as ambiguous characters in terms of the values they embody, the roles they play, and how they are identified within society (Khan 2000; Ahmed 2004; Devine 2007; Hoek 2013; Suykens 2015; Banks 2016). At a moral level, they are on the one hand associated with criminality and lawlessness, but on the other also seen as ‘honourable heroes’, protecting victims of injustice (Devine 2007: 9). They may also portray themselves in this way (Ruud 2014: 316). For Khan (2000) the *mastan* fill a ‘structural hole’, where ‘*gusti*<sup>54</sup> and lineage based neighbourhoods... do not exist or are not as strong in the urban *bustee* context’ (Khan 2000: 233). Hence they build norms and maintain ‘informal rights’ (Ibid). Work on popular culture in Bangladesh has pointed to this ambiguity well, the slogan of one cinema poster, for a film titled *Noya Mastan* reading ‘he is killer but not terrorist’ (Hoek 2013: 122), implying a sense of righteous violence. This ambiguity can even be seen in the etymological understandings of the word. Kaur (2005: 174) writes that the term refers

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<sup>53</sup> Atkinson-Sheppard (2015: 5) has argued that ‘*mastaans* operate in every slum in Dhaka’. These ‘groups’ are headed by a *mastan* who has a ‘right hand man’ and controls street level gangs who mediate access to services, run extortion networks and are involved in land grabbing. Though she claims to offer the ‘the first robust empirical study of the gangs of Bangladesh’ (Ibid: 2), the article offers no evidence to support the claims made, and focuses on accounts from children of how they are included in political violence and crime.

<sup>54</sup> *Gusti* refers to a lineage group.



to ‘he who is in a state of *mast*, or of being wholly absorbed into the love for God or his representative’, and at root is then a ‘mystic figure’ within the Sufi tradition (Ibid)<sup>55</sup>. Ahmed (2004: 101) argues that the term is of Turko-Persian origin and sees these spiritual connotations as at the heart of why the *mastan* are so prominent in popular imagination, representing someone who is willing to sacrifice themselves for a greater good<sup>56</sup>.

Consistent with these ambiguities, and also with the colonial portrayals of *sardar*, *mastan* are understood as playing a role that is inherently both inhibiting and helpful in the lives of the urban poor. As Khan (2000: 47) writes, ‘mastaans are both the source of uncertainty and as well as offering a relationship for managing insecurity and risk’. Because it is the *mastan* who are understood as having the capability for violence at a local level, being subject to violence, facing financial penalties or being denied access to resources are potential consequences of opposing them. As Khan (2000: 85) described his research in a Dhaka *bosti* ‘everyone knows the price to be paid for resisting or challenging mastaans’: violence. Analysis often gives greater weight to the negative dynamics to these relationships. The *mastan* have been portrayed as part of a ‘hostile political economy’ (Wood and Salway 2000; Banks 2012), which is ‘amongst the biggest obstacles facing the urban poor’ (Banks 2012: 46) and seriously inhibits agency (Wood and Salway 2000). The World Bank (2007: 57) similarly described *mastan* as a ‘major obstacle to reaching the poor’. Similar descriptions are also found of the wider actors identified in the urban context. Writing of the politically affiliated *bosti* residents, Hossain (2013: 222) argues

Their interests are quite different from those of the community, and they work within a closed system that suits their mutual needs and promotes their financial benefits to the detriment of the general inhabitants.

Alongside these portrayals of *mastan* as dominating urban spaces however also sits a sense that this is not the entire story. At one level there is ambiguity over who precisely the *mastan* are (Devine 2007; Suykens 2015; Banks 2016). In the context of a slum in Chittagong Suykens (2015: 496) writes that the ‘line between being a mastaan, a jomidar or a community leader was sometimes thin and blurred’. Supporting this argument Banks (2016: 13) notes that not all local leaders in Dhaka’s slums are *mastan*. Some authors have described *mastan* as being gangs (Khan 2000) while others more as individuals (Suykens 2015; Banks 2016).

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<sup>55</sup> My experience in the *mazar* of Dhaka suggests that the term can still occasionally have religious connotations.

<sup>56</sup> 19th century English translations from Hindustani however define the term *mast* as meaning ‘drunk, intoxicated, lustful...’ (Shakespeare 1849: 1896). It is this latter definition that is acknowledged in the political and economic dictionary of South Asia by Mitra et al (2015). They write that the term *mastan* is a ‘Bengali word originally used to refer to a person who is in a state of intoxication... today used to refer to armed individuals who collect ‘rent’ from businessmen, industrialists, construction contractors, independent professionals or even squatters on government land’ (Ibid: 239).

In a similar vein, not all urban literature has focused on the figure of the *mastan* to conceptualise the nature of intermediation (Hossain 2011b; Hackenbroch and Hossain 2012; Hackenbroch 2013; Hossain 2013). Though Hossain (2013) and Hackenbroch and Hossain (2012) briefly reference the *mastan* as significant in Dhaka's *bosti* it is actually the explicitly party political organisation of local power that these studies examine. Studying the provision of urban water services, Hossain (2011) describes how state services are 'politicised', subject to the interests of the ruling party, and how people improve their access to this service through party political connections. Party politics provides a legitimacy to the informal provision of water, and urban residents are heavily dependent on party leaders. Similarly, Hackenbroch and Hossain (2012) show how once Awami League affiliated leaders came into power they took control over key community structures (such as the *salish*, bazaar and mosque committee), which they used to extract rents from the community. Political connections allowed preferential access to government services and a good relationship with the police, which was supplemented by 'tea, cakes, Coca-Cola and money' (Ibid: 412). Hackenbroch (2013) also examines the significance of party political leaders in determining access to space for businesses in a bazar. Alongside the *mastan*, other urban studies have similarly highlighted how affiliation or membership within the ruling political party enables access to valuable resources such as work, space or opportunities (Banks 2008; Suykens 2015).

Furthermore, elsewhere in Bangladesh, studies have highlighted the rapidly changing nature of what has been framed here as order and intermediation. The classic rural conceptualisation of these hierarchical relationships was a 'net' under which the poor were caught (BRAC 1983). More recently, some have however argued that this net has loosened, and that a 'new rural power structure' has emerged, which

Under certain circumstances allows 'room for manoeuvre' for weaker sections of the community to advance their interests, and for government and NGOs to open up space for pro-poor change (Lewis and Hossain 2008: 48).

The importance *mastan* have been understood as having in the urban context as key intermediaries to whom the urban poor relate and as leading violent factions connected to the ruling coalition, establishes them as a central actor for further empirical research. The significance given to other actors, such as explicitly party political leaders and followers (Hossain 2011b; Hackenbroch and Hossain 2012; Suykens 2015; Banks 2016) and the continued role of the *sardar* (Khan 2000) however also suggests a broader constellation of intermediaries, and forms of organisation, that need to be examined in relation to one another and to the urban poor. Furthermore, although acknowledged as intermediaries, significant questions remain about how precisely these actors have a capability for violence, what forms this takes, and how it interacts with the factions noted as significant in macro studies from Bangladesh (Khan 2010a, 2013) and posited as significant in the framework developed here. Violence is acknowledged however not explicitly examined. The bearing this has on people's lives and how it is negotiated are significant questions for further research.

### 3.3. CONCLUSION

This chapter has applied the framework developed in chapter two to Dhaka, focusing on the nature of intermediation in the lives of the urban poor. Literature and historical sources suggest that there is a complex array of actors prominent in the lives of the urban poor, and that these actors are closely associated with having a capability for violence, which they use to control valuable resources, making others dependent upon them. Through applying the LAO framework it has been suggested that *mastan* gangs identified as powerful in Dhaka are similar to the *goonda* highlighted by previous generations. The rise of *mastan* to power in Dhaka through the 1990s can perhaps be understood in terms of the dynamics of competitive clientelism, and how political parties require the capability for violence on the ground to compete. At the same time, it has also been suggested that there is a high degree of ambiguity in who *mastan* are and the roles they play in contemporary Bangladesh. Furthermore, the labour leaders once seen as powerful and ubiquitous across colonial India have disappeared from analyses, along with the *dal* they were identified as organising. All of this poses questions regarding the nature of intermediation in contemporary Dhaka – the actors to whom the urban poor look, the roles these actors play in relation to the urban poor and how the poor negotiate these relationships.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

*Don't you get bored asking us all these questions?!*

Liton, a labourer at Karwan Bazar

This thesis intends to build an emic account of social order from the perspective of the *kangali* in urban Bangladesh. The data on which arguments are built have been accumulated from research and reflections over a year's ethnographic fieldwork between 2014 and 2015, a two week period of research in 2013, two years of insights gained at arms length working in the broader context, and through examining archives for just under a month. It has built up iteratively over the years: for example months of fieldwork interspersed with weeks of writing and reading, mornings spent in archives and afternoons researching in Dhaka.

Descriptions of research methodologies often account well for the methods they use, however less well for the experience of research itself (Berreman 2007). In addition to explaining methods, data validation and modes of analysis, this chapter offers insight into the experience of doing ethnography in Dhaka. In particular it focuses on the idea of exploration as an early stage of immersion, and on the dynamics by which I as a researcher negotiated my presence and status in my research contexts. When read in relation to chapter nine, it will become clear that there is a commonality in the dynamics of negotiation between a researcher gaining access to a research context,

and the means by which people negotiate access to valuable resources elsewhere. If dominant forms of intermediation are premised on a capability for violence, gaining access to certain research contexts necessitates grappling with this. Recognising this supports an argument for seeing ethnography as political, a negotiated and sometimes contentious process in which researchers have to creatively gain and negotiate insights into a world in which they are very often initially largely unfamiliar.

The data used in this thesis comes from multi-site ethnographies across Dhaka City. Research focused on Karwan Bazar, a large wholesale fruit and vegetable market at the centre of the city. Research was also conducted at three further research sites, a park and two pavements (one of which was adjacent to the bazar), to supplement and validate findings. These sites are discussed here to the extent necessary to explain the methodology, however are more fully introduced in the following chapter. The first half of this chapter frames the methodology in relation to wider political ethnographies, before describing the early stages of research relating to immersion, gatekeepers and choosing a research context. The second half of this chapter starts by giving insight into the negotiations in which I had to engage, relating these to literature on obligations (Rosen 1984) and the presentation of self in everyday life (Goffman 1956). This chapter finishes with a discussion of data validation and analysis.

#### 4.1. THEORY AND EARLY DAYS

##### 4.1.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND APPROACH

The analytical framework used in this thesis was developed in chapter two. Following recent work on political settlements social order in most societies is understood as resting on a dispersed set of actors forming a coalition and dominating rivals on the basis of their superior capability for violence (North et al 2009; Khan 2010b). Khan (2010b) argues that this coalition is formed from actors at different levels of society organised at factions. To date this framework has been theorised and examined empirically at the macro level, and the intention of this thesis is to use these ideas to analyse the lives of the *kangali*, those considered the most destitute in the urban context in Bangladesh. A key conceptual step taken in chapter two was to posit a relationship between intermediation (Tilly 1985; Devine 1999; Wood 2010) and the capability for violence, suggesting a relationship between relationships of intermediation or brokerage and how the ruling coalition is organised.

This framework opens up seeing the relationships through which people gain access to resources they need to pursue their livelihoods and interests in relation to how violence is organised. Important questions emerge about what these relationships look like and how they are negotiated in people's lives. Furthermore, if this posited relationship does hold true, it suggests that we can look through the lives of people who rely on these intermediaries to understand the dynamics of social order from a new perspective. Indeed, viewed in this light, existing empirical research from Bangladesh does suggest a close relationship between intermediation and violence,

through, for example, the *mastan* gangs which literature suggests are powerful in Dhaka.

The overarching research question given in the introduction to this thesis was ‘how do the *kangali* relate to the social order in urban Bangladesh?’ On the basis of the framework developed in chapter two, a number of further sub-questions can now be offered. These are:

1. What forms of intermediation do the *kangali* in Dhaka city experience?
2. How do the *kangali* negotiate this intermediation?
3. What do the dynamics of these say about the nature of social order in Bangladesh?

This thesis utilises the framework developed in chapter two to develop an emic account of social order from the perspective of the *kangali*. Fundamental to how this is approached ontologically is the proposition that agency and structure are constantly in an act of creation, and as such social order is dynamic and changing in nature (Giddens 1984). The intention to build an emic account of social order, necessitates a methodological approach which is empirically open to how people themselves give meaning to, and understand the dynamics within their own lives. This focus corresponds to ethnography, and combined with a focus on intermediation and politics, situates this thesis within a broad tradition of ethnographic work from sociology and anthropology. Ethnography can be understood as

social research based on the close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space, in which the investigator embeds herself near (or within) the phenomenon so as to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do (Wacquant 2003: 5, cited in Auyero and Joseph 2007: 2)

Essential to ethnography is the value given to immersion, which is understood as embeddedness in people’s everyday lives. Embeddedness requires a strong sense of positionality (Sultana 2007), meaning an awareness of how one as a researcher relates to the research context on the basis of what are often significant socio-cultural and economic differences. Methodologically, ethnography necessitates an iterative process of research which is ‘theoretically informed’ (Willis and Trondman 2002: 396) but also analytically open, so ideas are pieced together, triangulated, questioned, tested and re-formulated. This means that it is reflexive and responsive, in a sense ‘open-ended’ (Maxwell 2009), combining opportunism and benefitting from unpredictability. It involves ‘gathering whatever data are available to throw issues on the emerging focus of enquiry’ (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007: 3). As Tilly (2006: 441) puts it, it blends ‘art and science’, where the ‘shrewd observations’ of art are combined with the ‘systematic use of accumulated knowledge’.

The political nature of social order, as examined in chapter two, brings the focus of this thesis particularly close to work on political ethnography (Auyero 2001; Arias

2006; Baiocchi and Connor 2008; Berenschot 2011). This field, broadly speaking, is where ethnography is used to understand political phenomenon, often focusing in on the dynamics of brokerage. Contemporary political ethnography is often interdisciplinary (Baiocchi and Connor 2008: 149) though can be embedded within political science (Schatz 2013), sociology (Auyero 2001) and anthropology (Michelutti 2013; Piliavsky 2014). It can also be seen as rooted in a longer history of political anthropology, a seminal example of which is Scott's (1985) work on the 'weapons of the weak'. Baiocchi and Connor (2008) delineate different meanings of political ethnography. They argue it can mean first, the study of conventionally defined political actors, institutions and events; second, the 'routine encounters' between people and these actors and institutions; and finally, wider phenomenon that are of 'consequence to politics in some way' (Ibid: 140). Understood through this schema, the framework developed in this thesis draws on each of these areas.

A focus on intermediation also relates this thesis to work on access analysis, which emerged in sociology and development studies from the 1970s (Schaffer and Lamb 1974; Schaffer 1985; Wood 1985; Ribot and Peluso 2003). For Ribot and Peluso (2003: 160) access analysis is 'the process of identifying and mapping the mechanisms by which access is gained, maintained, and controlled'. We can add to this the inverse - how access is denied, limited and exclusionary. They highlight three steps that can be used to guide research and analysis in the field, which were adopted in this methodology:

- Identifying and mapping the flow of the particular benefit of interest
- Identifying the mechanisms by which different actors involved gain, control, and maintain the benefit flow and its distribution and
- An analysis of the power relations underlying the mechanisms of access involved in instances where benefits are derived (Ribot and Peluso 2003: 161).

Given the deep interconnections between access, power and politics, some form of this analysis has arguably underpinned ethnographic work from Bangladesh concerned with rural power, peasants and agrarian change (Jahangir 1979; Wood 1976; Arens and van Beurden 1978; Hartman and Boyce 1983; Jansen 1986). Ethnographic approaches have driven much NGO analysis, as exemplified by the seminal work by BRAC, '*the net*' in 1983. A subsequent body of work has built on this tradition but with more specific foci, such as gender and class (White 1988), agricultural technology (Lewis 1989), access to financial services (McGregor 1991), NGOs and mobilisation (Devine 1999), networks and livelihoods (Khan 2000) and informal social protection (Davis 2005). Taken together these represent an interesting lineage of ethnography from Bangladesh, though as noted in the introduction, this ethnographic tradition has now been 'more or less lost' (Hossain 2011: 2).

#### 4.1.2. EXPLORING, RESEARCH SITE AND GATEKEEPERS

The background to my doctoral fieldwork was having lived and worked in Bangladesh on a UK Aid extreme poverty reduction programme between 2010 and 2012. From

this I had worked closely on a number of livelihoods focused and NGO led projects in both rural and urban areas. In an urban context I had worked often in the city's *bosti*, primarily in a monitoring and evaluation capacity. I had also worked on an NGO project with the city's so-called "street dwellers" attempting to start a social business, which was a complete failure<sup>57</sup>. I had built on these experiences through consultancy as a project reviewer in 2013 with the same programme and also a two week period of research as the basis for an MRes dissertation, which focused broadly on the issues examined here, though looked at through a different set of concepts and vocabulary<sup>58</sup>. It is within the context of these experiences that my approach to fieldwork should be understood.

After arriving back in Dhaka in mid-February 2014 to undertake fieldwork I was faced with an issue that was fundamental to the nature of my proposed research, and the backbone to an ethnographic approach: immersion. My previous experience in Bangladesh had always been through the prism of an aid programme. My interaction in "the field" was mediated through programme and project NGO staff, and insights often carefully managed, navigated and sometimes even censored. I had always been frustrated by this, but had begrudgingly acknowledged my need for an assistant and direct organisational support (in other words, intermediation) to access my research context and gain the level of insight I desired. This had all been acknowledged in my pre-field work methodology, designed in the midst of an English winter reflecting back on a couple of tiring years in the country, and I knew I could produce a PhD on the basis of replicating this pattern of interaction. For my research to be ethnographic however, I knew I had to challenge my understandings about what was possible in a context I already – in many ways – knew. After settling back in for a couple of weeks, my freedom as a researcher – as compared to a full time member of staff – seemed to open out a new set of possibilities which I had not fully appreciated. I began taking Bengali lessons in a language centre not far from my apartment that I shared with my (now) wife in an elite neighbourhood, however I felt confined in a class room, too curious to stay inside, and too stubborn to want to work with others. In order to manage this I developed a schedule – Bangla classes in the morning, and exploring the city in the afternoon/evening, a structure I maintained for a couple of months. The Bangla classes and exploring became synergistic, lessons driven by my observations not textbooks, directed towards my interest in the vocabularies of power, politics and marginalisation<sup>59</sup>.

Reflecting back, my 'exploring' had two purposes: firstly, it was a way of gently challenging the patterns of interaction I was familiar with from working in the aid

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<sup>57</sup> This project was designed to include street dwellers in the distribution chain of a social business selling hygienic street food, however operated without a business model and closed when project funding stopped.

<sup>58</sup> This two week period of research focused on three locations – Karwan Bazar, Purana Paltan/Bangabandu Stadium and Osmani Uddyan Market/Bongo bazar.

<sup>59</sup> This certainly made for more interesting classes, and was amusing for my teachers, though on reflection was perhaps detrimental to my understanding of Bengali grammar.

industry. Secondly, it was a way of me ‘constructing’ the field (Amit 2000), delineating my areas of interest and beginning to form ideas and better sense the scope for more directed research. I thus wandered after dark when the streets were mainly empty, sat at late night tea stalls and chatted to whoever was about. I saw daily life – the labour, the begging, the scavenging, people cooking on makeshift fires between the cracks in paving tiles and gutters, people listening to music and watching programmes on their phones under mosquito nets, people injecting themselves along railway lines, people tending to poultry in cages, or the odd pet rabbit, cat or bird. I walked around vibrant *mazar*, *baul* singing and telling stories, hundreds of people lying asleep on the floor. I walked to the city’s edges, to where the apartment blocks turn into sparser single and double storied buildings, where the paddy fields mix with small industry, and developer’s signs mark their territory. I walked along the city railway lines, receiving catcalls from the so-called “floating” prostitutes, and feigning ignorance when petty drug dealers offered me *gaza* (marijuana) or *yabba* (a methamphetamine produced in Myanmar), to get drawn into conversations. In doing this I was vulnerable – the city could be dangerous and I was alone, I could not understand everything nor manage people’s impressions of me – and yet, I was often just passing through, interaction was time bound and I had little invested in the spaces I visited. Exploring therefore helped ease myself into immersion, exposing myself to risks, but also in a managed way. I absorbed the city, spent inordinate amounts of time in traffic jams, sweating through shirt after shirt as spring and summer melded and building up confidence in Bangla.

An analytical starting point to my research had been an interest in urban spaces, how they are inhabited and who by. In particular, I was interested in people living in the worse conditions, some of whom I had worked with previously. I wrote early draft chapters using terminology and classifications adopted from literature and practice – ‘street dweller’, ‘pavement dweller’, ‘homeless’ - however being wary of these, I wanted to see for myself what they tried to refer to or capture. I also became interested in how these people are conceptualised in public discourse, the language and labels that are employed to describe them, and the concepts drawn upon. At times I would record this systematically, making mental notes or jotting them down on paper or on my phone, later creating a small ‘qualitative survey of perceptions’ which consisted mostly of answers from *CNG wallah* (drivers of auto-rickshaws) collected during endless traffic jams and with the backdrop of deafening bus and truck horns. As my Bangla improved I grappled with translating abstract concepts such as intermediation, access and negotiation into people’s everyday lives; for example through the language of relationships, leadership, finding work or gaining permission for a business. I noticed how along some railway lines and pavements people lived under tarpaulin and mosquito nets in clearly delineated spaces, but unlike the more developed and serviced *bosti* I was familiar with. I also started to sense communities among the people living in the open, networks and groups. Sensing the dynamism, movement and complexity in these spaces, is in the same spirit as Gandhi and Hoek’s (2012: 4) observation, when writing of South Asian cities in general, that ‘parks, markets and roadsides have



present and potential incarnations: as venues of danger and pleasure, segregation and *communitas*, sincerity and irreverence'. Beginning to discern the meanings of these spaces was therefore part of my earlier attempts to delineate and construct "the field". This always involves choices, as Amit (2000: 6) writes, the field 'has to be laboriously constructed, prised apart from all the other possibilities for contextualisation to which its constituent relationships and connections could also be referred' (Amit 2000: 6)<sup>60</sup>.

At this stage a serious challenge encountered was the level of attention I received everywhere I went, and this is unsurprising for anyone who has been to Bangladesh. Dhaka is one of the most densely populated cities in the world. Public space is extremely limited, and people socialise on the pavements and roadsides which are themselves often crammed with small businesses. It is not nearly as cosmopolitan as other South Asian capitals, and *bideshi* (foreigner) are an object of curiosity outside of a few elite neighbourhoods<sup>61</sup>. Despite Dhaka being a capital city with a population of over 15 million, in the vast majority of areas in the city the presence of a *bideshi* can easily draw a crowd in a matter of minutes, particularly if they are female. This presented a very significant challenge to this research. My "field" was most often the open spaces, the public places and thoroughways. In only very limited instances was I working in clearly demarcated, quiet or private spaces away from the crowds. On innumerable occasions in these open spaces I began conversations with someone and passers-by simply stopped in their tracks, a foot or so away, looking and listening, sometimes eager to make conversation with me, other times amused, and at other times simply baffled. This made me, and often whoever I was speaking to, uncomfortable. It was also not a problem that went away because, unlike in a village or perhaps even a large *bosti*, here passers-by change and there are new curiosities to satiate.

By around April 2015, my interests when "exploring" became more systematic, and I began to plan how to direct my research into a more in depth and ethnographic direction. Immersion in a particular research context is central to ethnography (Emerson et al 1995), and critical to this was the question of access. Research is fundamentally contingent on access to the resource context, however is often neglected in methodological descriptions and analyses (Harrington 2003; Alcadipani and Hodgson 2009). The possibility of research is often contingent on the quality of gatekeepers (Harrington 2003) and the immediate issue I faced was how to find an appropriate gatekeeper. Gatekeeping can be understood as a form of intermediation, as conceptualised in this thesis<sup>62</sup>. Though my phone contacts list had expanded rapidly

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<sup>60</sup> Locating 'the field' was in fact a large part of the research itself, because it involved understanding how inhabited urban spaces are positioned, connected and demarcated in relation to wider society.

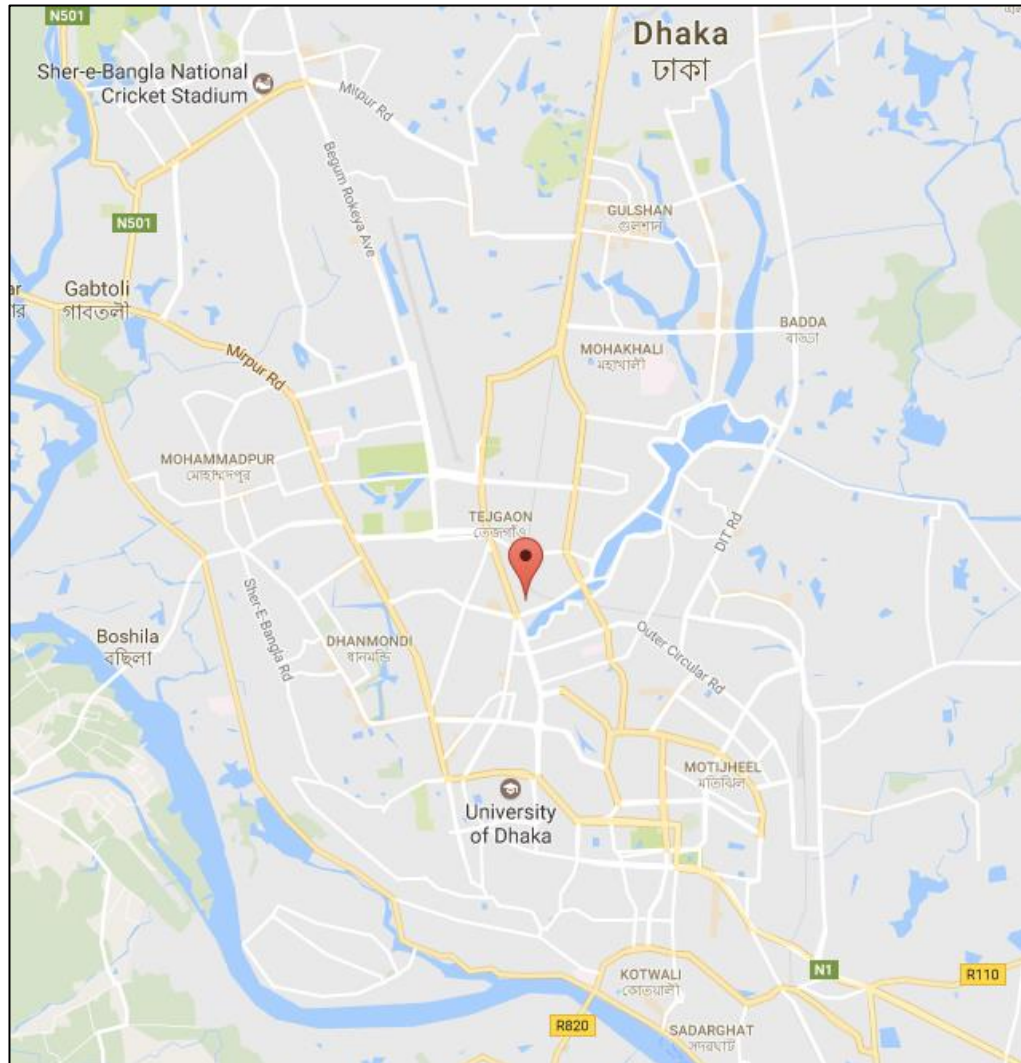
<sup>61</sup> Unlike in Dhaka's cousin, Kolkata, there are few ethnic groups from outside of the region that have assimilated into the city. The European and "Western" communities of the colonial and immediate post-colonial period – the British, Armenians, Greeks, Jews – have disappeared, as have almost all the Anglo-Indians. There are however some priests and missionaries. East Asians in the city have all arrived and established businesses in recent decades with the exception of a few Chinese families, who are the descendants of an earlier small Chinese community from the British period.

<sup>62</sup> Different of course because I was moving "downwards" hierarchically in terms of perceived status, rather than "upwards".

with the details of guards, local leaders, shopkeepers and labourers, I found it difficult to navigate this world effectively enough to establish and rely on these contacts as gatekeepers. I therefore looked back at employees of NGOs, with whom I had retained close relationships. I had maintained a particular connection with the *Amrao Manush* (“we are also human”) project, working with people they term “street dwellers”, led by the Irish NGO Concern Worldwide and delivered through three local partners – Sajida Foundation, SEEP and *Nari Maitree*.

The project has nine centres across the city providing a range of services including night shelters to women and children. I therefore visited each of these, speaking to the managers, field staff and “beneficiaries” who happened to be around, exploring some of the concepts of intermediation. I built profiles of each area – the numbers of beneficiaries, demographic and occupational trends, a sense of local hierarchies and politics, and the experiences staff had had interacting with these. I took print outs of maps of the local areas to sketch these details. I also visited and built relationships with a number of other local and international NGOs – more notably visiting small Christian run drop in centres near Kamalapur and Sadarghat, and attending various meetings led by the Coalition for the Urban Poor (CUP), an umbrella advocacy organisation on urban issues. These interactions – which were concentrated during this stage but continued throughout the fieldwork – helped me begin to collate and delineate perceptions, labels, sketch out common hierarchies, and significantly also led me to choose my major field work location – Karwan Bazar.

FIGURE 1: MAP OF KARWAN BAZAR IN DHAKA



*Source: google maps*

Having explored many possible research sites across Dhaka I settled on Karwan Bazar as the principle location for my ethnographic work<sup>63</sup>. Prior to 2012 I had been only vaguely familiar with the area, having visited the Sajida Foundation centre there for work and stumbled across the bazar once by accident, quickly retreating from its chaos. In mid-2013 I conducted some interviews there through the same centre and from these insights and subsequent desk research I became intrigued by the place. The busyness of the place spoke to there being a lot going on, a lot to study. It was told it had been the heartland of a legendary gang leader *Picchi Hannan* in the early 2000s and still carried a reputation for violence and crime. Being the major vegetable wholesale market in the city, it was also a potentially interesting place to explore intermediation in relation to employment, and hence labour relations. Nestled between major commercial and media areas, for me it poignantly symbolised the city's inequalities.

This was not to say that Karwan Bazar was unique compared to other locations; having surveyed many possible research locations across Dhaka I felt that all of the sites were in some way distinctive. The dynamics at each location represent the political, economic and social dynamics of the wider area as well as society in general, and there is no prototypical research location (White 1988). In practice the final selection of research locations for ethnographic work *has* to draw closely on more subjective criteria. To engage ethnographically is a highly personal experience, and therefore for the approach to meet the standards set by it – for it to have authority and credibility – a researcher has to feel some form of comfort, confidence or happiness there. Karwan Bazar was therefore chosen primarily because it felt like an interesting place, and like the 'right place'. For purely practical reasons I assessed that if I felt this about my research location then I would be more likely to do a better job of the research. Moreover, alongside the appeal of the location, I had also built a good relationship with local NGO staff, and felt confident that they could help facilitate the work and provide useful insights in this context. A point not to underestimate was that it was also logistically convenient. By CNG at the right time of day (from around 11pm to 8am) it would take around 10 minutes to travel from my apartment. At the wrong time of day it could take up to a couple of hours, as it often did, though that was less than other parts of the city. Strangely for such a busy place I also sensed it offered me a small degree of anonymity, its sheer busyness meant people were focused on work, not the odd foreigner. I was as likely to get hit by a moving rickshaw van or sack of carrots as anyone else.

Importantly, an association with the NGO allowed me to become a familiar face at the bazar, and I could free ride on their status as a positive and non-contentious presence. Staff always suggested I conducted interviews and that they could facilitate, but I always politely declined, wanting to create less formal relationships at that stage. I

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<sup>63</sup> I include with Karwan Bazar a nearby pavement which is next to Pantho Kunjo park very close to the bazar. This was not my primary focus and therefore appears less in the descriptions within this chapter and this thesis, however I did visit very regularly.

often simply hung out at the centre, observed the rhythms of the day, the services provided, and the interaction between staff and “beneficiaries”. I also began shadowing the field staff during their daily routine, primarily collecting savings instalments, examining who they worked with, how and why. I met a lot of people living at Karwan Bazar and a nearby pavement adjacent to Pantho Kunjo park, and tried to systematically record and build up my understanding about their lives through our conversations. After a while I offered to informally teach English to the few school going girls who were staying permanently at the centre, but whose parents lived nearby. I would typically do this a couple of times a week, after they got back from school in the afternoons.

I also sensed however that a reliance on the NGO as an intermediary or gatekeeper would limit my insight. Organisations have a reputation to maintain and when acting as a gatekeeper can perceive research as a threat (Alcadipani and Hodgson 2009). Having been completely transparent with staff about my interests, they sometimes feigned ignorance, presumably judging the danger that discussing openly such topics could present. There was also a genuine gap in knowledge between the NGO’s world and the dynamics of daily life at the bazar. There were certain things they clearly did not want to know and felt they did not need to know about the dynamics of local life (for example political affiliations and relationships), and chose to keep a strategic distance from these, as discussed in chapter nine. After a couple of months I therefore began to spend time alone at the bazar, building on the relationships with people I had been introduced to. In 2013 I had got limited insight into a group of labourers at the bazar<sup>64</sup>, many of whom had grown up between NGO centres, and who transported vegetables on flat backed rickshaw vans by night. One day I decided to start up a conversation with the group behind a bus where they slept during the day. This innocuous step was very significant in my mind, as it represented moving into a social environment where we related on their terms and not mine. It was therefore a moment of vulnerability, despite the obvious inequalities. I learnt that this group was called the *jupri* (shack) group, and from this moment on it was to this group that I turned, this group that I spent hours and days and nights with, drank tea with, smoked cigarettes and refused offers of marijuana with jokes. This was where I would learn the most and from which the key stories of my PhD emerged from.

## 4.2. RESEARCH IN PRACTICE AND ANALYSIS

### 4.2.1. NEGOTIATING RESEARCH AND ETHICS IN THE FIELD

Access in a research context goes beyond gaining access, or ‘entry’, as discussed above in relation to gatekeepers. Continued access to a research context, gathering data and insight, is contingent on the perceptions that people form of the researcher, the relationships that evolve, and how these influence the type of engagement a researcher is able to have (Harrington 2003; Kawulich 2011). This is perhaps even

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<sup>64</sup> A pre-cursor to my doctoral fieldwork was two-week period of fieldwork for a MRes in International Development, also at the University of Bath.

more so the case in ethnography than other methodologies. This section examines my experiences negotiating a place in the research context, and explores the ethical issues this raised.

Berreman (2007: 138) wrote that ‘every ethnographer, when he reaches the field, is faced immediately with accounting for himself before the people he proposes to learn to know’. As such, a researcher has to engage in what Goffman (1956) termed the ‘arts of impression management’, the art of negotiating the perceptions of others. In my research context, moving from pleasantries to eventually discussing and witnessing the complexities and dynamics of intermediation, including rivalries and conflict, is a big step, one that was neither natural nor easy. Having perhaps naively imagined being able to build relationships “organically”, I found that in reality the friendships and acquaintances I built were contingent on doing the opposite, very purposefully nurturing relationships. The major methodological task I faced was trying to build an identity that people could relate to, that would cut the right balance between being deserved of respect, looked upon kindly, but not looked to as someone who can play the semi-salvific role which is often so closely associated with *bideshi*. An important part of this was being situated appropriately in the local ‘moral economy’. Relationships bring moral obligations, and these are magnified in contexts of severe inequality. To be perceived as moral – and therefore to open the possibility of friendships – I had to manage what Rosen (1984) termed the ‘balance of obligations’. The distinction between building ‘rapport’ and ‘friendships’ (Glesne 1989), is very often complicated in a context like Bangladesh where communication itself can be taken as a sign of commitment to a relationship and therefore as a sign of obligation. How I negotiated this is discussed in detail below.

At the outset I knew that perceptions of me would be quick to take hold and difficult to alter. I was cautious of being associated with the trapping of Dhakaite and foreign elites, particularly as I was always open about living in a wealthy neighbourhood. Being in the centre of the city, people were used to seeing *bideshi* going to nearby offices, coming out of the nearby five star hotel, and apparently using local brothels. Teaching English at the *Sajida Foundation* centre, being associated with their field staff, and later a further centre for boys at the bazar run by a local NGO *Aparajeyo Bangladesh* provided an immediate justification for my presence at Karwan Bazar. Rather than arrive in car or taxi – as it common for elites in Dhaka – I would arrive on foot, by CNG or bus. Often I would walk down the railway lines and became familiar to a nearby group of young men affiliated under a *boro bhai* Ziad<sup>65</sup>, where I would stop off along the way, drinking tea in the rail line *bosti*. Given that my presence in the bazar was in itself unusual, I found ways to normalise my interaction there by presenting it as part of a daily routine where my focus was not at the bazar itself, but

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<sup>65</sup> I never got to the bottom of this character and neither he nor his group appear in this thesis. He smoked a lot of marijuana, regularly gave me tea and cigarettes, once threatened me with kidnap when high, and later had to leave Dhaka for his home village in Noakhali due – so I understand – to the local shops he extorted (took informal rents from) being destroyed by a police eviction following a train accident.

one of the nearby NGO centres. At the same time I was clear that I was a student conducting research, but would sometimes present my research as something restricted to formal interviews, or confined to NGO centres, with my presence on the street or bazar motivated by *learning* and *being interested*. At other times I would be completely open about my purpose, and I judged the appropriateness of being transparent in the specific context. Initially, having been used to saying I worked on an aid programme, I became disheartened with people's disappointment on hearing that I was a student. For many, a businessman or at least an NGO worker would have been a much better contact. I quickly realised however that this was to my advantage. I was someone who, though not looked down on, was perceived to have not yet entered the adult world of economic self-sufficiency and independence, and therefore was not associated with being able to offer opportunities to others in the same way, nor certain forms of reciprocal relationships.

I found that despite the clear differences I was in many ways very similar to the labourers at Karwan Bazar. I was a young man in my late 20s. Some of the group had recently got married and moved away from the bazar to *bosti* nearby, establishing a family life to which they periodically returned. Others in the group were single, living a more carefree existence, consuming more drugs for example (compared to those in the group with homes and dependents elsewhere). Yet, we were all confronted with similar experiences, however different the contexts – establishing ourselves, getting married, starting a family. Though it was naturally more difficult to speak to women given South Asian and Islamic norms about interaction between genders, I became a familiar face at the Sajida Foundation centre, and was to some degree trusted and respected by the users of the centre<sup>66</sup>. Gaining insights from these relationships came in part organically from listening to people's lives, trying to understand their perceptions, and observing their interactions. This was a slow process, requiring me to learn to listen, be comfortable in silence, and not jump on topics of interest. I tried to balance interest with feigned disinterest, and pretended not to be overly concerned in the drug deals, descriptions of fights and politics. I also balanced time within my research context, with being away, so as not to impose myself too much. Judging the appropriate time to ask questions, to probe, is an art that is far more difficult in a foreign language. I was often rebuffed - *don't you get bored of always asking questions?; We don't talk about the bad old days; why would we talk about these bad things?; It is dangerous to talk about this; why do you need to know?*<sup>67</sup> In some ways I took on the role of a more senior member in the *jupri* group, discussing how the world is, reasserting ethical maxims to teenagers, offering and being offered cigarettes, and having the body language and physical interaction in line with this (holding hands,

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<sup>66</sup> It should also be noted that for the kangali social interaction between men and women is far more open than is the norm in Bangladeshi society.

<sup>67</sup> As others have noted (Berreman 2007) it is possible that through long-term ethnographic research people are incentivised to divulge less of the truth as they see it because they foresee longer-term threats from a researcher's engagement. A further possibility is that people only divulge information when they feel that the researcher already knows the answer (thank you to Joe Devine for this point). To some extent both of these dynamics describe my experiences, particularly later on in the research.

slaps on the back and shoulders, occasional hugs and play fighting). I became referred to as 'David *bhai*' (brother) and was considered part of the group.

Becoming closer to the group was not a linear process, nor was it one that remained stable. The boundaries to my identity, to who I could be, were pushed, and my narratives of my intentions were questioned, and as such I had to continuously negotiate my presence in the research context (Bondy 2012). I was constantly asked variations of "*So your father is a big business man? How much money do you have in your account? But you must do some work here?*" On rarer occasions I would be asked questions like "*David bhai, why don't you speak to these prostitutes, do you not like sex?*" or "*So if your wife is away at the moment, you have no reason not to take us to the bar down the road!*" and the much milder but incessant "*just have a puff, you will like it, you will be relaxed*". Different rumours would spread – some women insisted to others that I was the "owner" of a local NGO for example. A persistent rumour among women and teenagers which threatened my image as a helpful and honest figure was that I had smoked marijuana with the *jupri* group<sup>68</sup>. More tarnishing still was a rumour that I had eaten a snake. I was for a time nicknamed *David dollar, a shontrash name* as one child explained<sup>69</sup>. Perceptions about me at one point became fantastical. One night some government officials (reportedly government social welfare ministry staff) came and tried to take children from their parents at Karwan Bazar for a new project, and only stopped when member of the *jupri* group in effect fought them off. Despite me being soundly asleep in my flat at the time, Shamim, a labourer, recalled to others in the *jupri* group how he had seen me tell the government officials to leave, how I protected the children, how if I had not been there it would have been terrible, and how I had done really well in that situation.

As I grew closer to the *jupri* group, I began to be seen as having an instrumental value that I had to carefully manage. This is similar to, but only in a far lighter way, the value Rodgers (2007) was seen as having in relation to the gang he joined in Nicaragua during doctoral fieldwork. I began to be called by the group to take a walk through the bazar to other areas, the only purpose of which seemed being seen together, greeting certain people as we walked. On a couple of occasions I would be taken to "see someone", with arguments ensuing and me left at the side trying to look as comfortable as could be. I was considered and used as one of the group, *you are with us*, I was often told. On one occasion the *jupri* group brought me along to exact minor retribution against someone who was trying to charge them too much to use the bazar toilets and showers. They took bamboo sticks and hit him around a little, knocked down a few tin walls, and made sure I was there, not involved in the fighting, but easily seen. The event was a way of demonstrating a capability for violence and a willingness to use it, and I was of symbolic value. I did have limits to my involvement though, and

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<sup>68</sup> Something I always made sure I didn't do to maintain my status. To diffuse people's incessant suggestions I always explained with a story about having smoked marijuana once and gone into the sky and not wanting to walk zig zag, which people seemed to find amusing.

<sup>69</sup> I am still not entirely sure why I was named this, other than the association with money.



despite being encouraged by some of the group, I deliberately excluded myself from attending political rallies, as I was concerned about being too clearly utilised by the group. Negotiating the possibility of being instrumental to violent ends continued through the research. In December 2014, I remember getting an innocuous seeming call from an elder labourer Liton to see if I was coming that evening to the bazar. I was not able to, but arrived the next morning to find that the group had been in a huge fight with a faction of the *Chattro League* (the student wing of the ruling *Awami League*). Some of the group later lamented the fact that I had not been there, reflecting how no one would have touched them if I had been.

There was always talk about who I could be to the group. This was often propagated by Liton, who saw me as a vehicle for him personally to do better. He would talk openly about how we would start a *samiti* (a savings group, see chapter eight for the significance of this), then an NGO, then a business, and I could be the chairperson. When he started his *samiti* he purposefully left a couple of shares for me to buy into, telling people he was waiting for me to sign up. I would often hang out with Liton and another labourer Shumon (who had converted to Islam from Hinduism after running away from home and living at the bazar). For a few months these would be the guys I went to, looked for, drunk the most tea and smoked the most cigarettes with. Shumon, a close friend of Liton's at the time (*the only person I trust at Karwan Bazar* he once told me), would sometimes give off the cuff and public statements for anyone around to hear such as a *there's only one Liton and one David in Karwan Bazar!*. Half jokes, half serious, people would talk about how I could become a local leader, people would shout "*David Bhai, David Bhai*". Others said that they would have to call me "*David sardar*". I always laughed these suggestions off, though at times some people would approach me seriously and ask about it. I had to be more forceful, reaffirming that I was just a student, wanted to work at a university, and had no interest in doing politics or business. I would also publically assert how I was a terrible fighter, with smaller biceps than them and glasses.

It is possible that had I played the role of a local leader my research and insight would have been greatly enhanced, however it would have equally raised the attention of local political leaders, police and threatened my relationship with NGOs. Partly because of luck, because of my affiliation with the *jupri* group, and because of my efforts to avoid being used instrumentally, on no occasion did I experience anything particularly aggressive or dangerous directed towards me at Karwan Bazar<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> I was never the target of violence at Karwan Bazar. For a long time outside of the bazar being hit by a waterbomb thrown by two mischievous pre-pubescent children in the early hours next to the university was the worst thing that had happened to me. Apparently the children made a habit of targeting the couple of men living on the pavement that I was chatting with. One version is that I happened to be unlucky collateral, the version I think is more likely is that they would get extra respect for having hit a bideshi. It was a good shot. Towards the end of my research there was one instance where something more serious happened. I had promised to show a later research site (Osmani Uddyan park opposite the Dhaka City Corporation South headquarters) to a Bangladeshi friend. When we were chatting over tea and cigarettes with a group of sewage workers who lived there, a local political leader of some variety arrived high on yabba. He claimed I had disrespected him earlier and would have me arrested, swiftly

Whenever I expressed doubt or fear about coming to the bazar, members of the *jupri* group would reassure me – *there won't be any problem, you are with us, and we are the strongest group here*. Rhetoric around my possible role however directly threatened a leader of the group, Rubel's status. Liton's *samiti* was a direct challenge to Rubel, and I therefore became a potential threat to the extent I was perceived as supporting Liton. When Rubel's leadership position became weakened (see chapter eight), he became colder towards me, started using the familiar pronoun *tumi* instead of the polite *apni*<sup>71</sup> with me as a way of publically reasserting his status in relation to me, and I had to make special effort to ensure his ego was sufficiently puffed, and my research intentions sufficiently clear, to not see me as a threat. To allow rumours about my potential involvement to be nurtured could threaten existing relations and compromise the principle of do no harm. This experience relates to an alternative way in which I was instrumental to the status of others. Rather than respecting me, disrespecting me could be a means by which people improved their own status. An insult towards me and heard by others – perhaps using colloquialisms I could not understand for example – would denigrate me and demonstrate the power of whoever made the comment. The example of Rubel calling me *tumi* instead of *apni* was a relatively common one. Though in many instances this would be an acceptable and even familial designation, used by a local political leader or pretender it could be a strategic and relatively subtle way of publically demonstrating their status, and putting me in my place.

A further ethical issue raised by field experiences was the balance between 'impression management' and 'covert research'. This refers to 'research which is not declared to the research participants or subjects' (Spicker 2011: 118), and as such is often identified as a contentious ethical issue because it appears to conflict with the principal of informed consent (Thorne 1980; Scheper-Hughes 2004; O'Reilly 2009; Spicker 2011). Classic historical and contemporary ethnographies have used this approach to a considerable degree. Whyte, in his study of the structure of an Italian slum in Boston, published as *Street Corner Society* (1943), kept his identity completely hidden from almost all research participants. More recently Scheper-Hughes' (2004: 45) in her research into the international organs trade, posed as a kidney buyer in Istanbul, entered 'incognito' into state facilities in Argentina, and purposefully misled people about her true research identity. The distinction between covert and overt research is often however more ambiguous than in these examples. As Berreman

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showing me the business cards of his contacts, including that of a state minister, and referring to me as *tumi* or *tui* (these ways of addressing me informally were a way of insulting me). Laughing it off, he then demanded 1000 taka, and pretended to punch me, stopping an inch before my nose. His presence had silenced the WASA labourers we were speaking to and with whom I had conducted research the month or so prior. Though I had befriended the local police chief a couple of weeks before I thought it wise for the sake of the guys to give in, and my friend gave him a 100, rather than 1000, taka. He left by throwing his cigarette at me and then giving me a hug. Since the research, my confidence that as a white man I am relatively safe in Dhaka has been shaken with the growth of terrorism targeting foreigners. The current climate raises serious questions regarding the practicalities for future ethnographic research in Bangladesh.

<sup>71</sup> *Tumi* and *apni* are the familiar and formal ways, respectively, of saying you in Bengali.

(2007: 147) argues, participant observation ‘inevitably entails some secrecy and some dissimulation on the level of interpersonal relations’. A degree of secrecy or omission is often required for research, and total honesty could negate the possibility of valid research findings (Ibid). In Dhaka for example, other researchers have found it helpful to conceal relationships to local NGOs. Khan (2000) kept the fact that he was working for a local NGO *Proshika* hidden in his research environment in a Dhaka *bosti* because the NGO had a contentious relationship with local *mastan*. It is possible to criticise this secrecy, but as Scheper-Hughes (2004: 45) asks ‘what alternative methods of investigation exist in tortured circumstances like these?’ In my own experiences I would often interact with people who did not know who I was. Those I was close to and who appear in this thesis knew I was a PhD researcher, however – as mentioned previously - I often left my specific interests vague, as I felt this could threaten and bias insights gained. To be direct with my interests around intermediation, violence, party politics and criminality would be threatening. Furthermore, being completely open about my interests would give other people leverage over me, and could potentially shift the balance of obligations in ways that would entangle me in more complicated relationships<sup>72</sup>.

Managing relationships, the identity on which these were predicated and the obligations they entailed, was therefore a continuous, tiring and emotional process. Few people in my research context would be content with a relationship that maintained friendly but casual over a long period. It should either become useful, reap material gains for them, or be maintained through high levels of contact and reaffirmation of the friendship. To not do so would be disrespectful and would call the relationship into disrepute. As Rakib, a rickshaw van driver who had grown up at Karwan Bazar, said to be almost aggressively – *what’s the point of keeping a relationship with you if you give me nothing and don’t even answer the phone?... you are the boro bhai [big brother] and I am the choto bhai [little brother]*... Ten minutes later we were having a deep conversation about the injustices of a nearby NGO and I was speaking to his wife on the phone, with him bragging about learning some English. People ranging from minor local political leaders to the labourers would constantly try and persuade me to start a business. I recall an interesting dialogue with a local chicken dealer who made incessant requests that I link him to NGOs to supply their lunchtime chicken. The conversations ended with him saying “*ok, so we will not do business, but we can do friendship*”. My attempts to create a boundary between my home life and research was constantly tested, people insistent on wanting to come to my house. This was all the more difficult with phones, particularly with Whatsapp, Viber and Facebook which people tangential to the group knew how to use. The

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<sup>72</sup> This notion that relationships in Bangladesh are instrumental to securing and pursuing people’s livelihoods and interests is central to this thesis. A value given to friendships is very often that they can help advance one’s interests. An undercurrent to relationships is the balance of obligations between individuals that are embodied in transactions and exchanges. These are constantly being negotiated, and in this context, people understanding very clearly about what I wanted from a relationship would give them better leverage to use me to pursue their interests.

balance between a 'home' and 'research' life has been described as 'schizophrenic' (Hoodfar 1994, cited in Caputo 2000), and this is how it sometimes felt.

#### 4.2.2. DATA, VALIDITY AND ANALYSIS

This section explains the data gathered through the research described above, how findings were validated and how arguments have been built. It pays particular attention to the mechanics of the data collection, the modes of verification and analysis, and finally the limits to the methodology adopted. These serve also to highlight scope for future research.

The primary means of data collection stemmed from the day-to-day immersion described in the previous section, which I recorded in a daily research diary. Throughout my time at Karwan Bazar, I built up profiles of the individuals I had come to know, focusing on the concept of intermediation, and therefore the actors to whom they looked to pursue their livelihoods and interests. I focused on understanding why these actors were deemed important, the varied roles they played, the meanings they had to people, and how these relationships changed and were negotiated. The mode of analysis often began with a focus on a particular resource, be it, for example, access to space, to work or security (Ribot and Peluso 2003). Alongside this, crosscutting themes emerged on which I began to reflect analytically, as well as particular events that offered insight into the nature of these relationships and their dynamics. Documenting these was a process of 'interpretation and sense-making' (Emerson et al 1995: 8). I often recorded my impressions in the field, jotting down notes on my phone or recording memos to myself, particularly noting turns of phrase, sentences and quotes that had made an impression on me. This was a relatively surreptitious way of making notes as I could easily go for a walk and appear as if I was speaking to someone, particularly as it was often in English.

At the end of each day researching, I would record these and reflect more widely in a field diary. Writing this was often a long and sometimes laborious process, but also a satisfying one, in that I felt progress was being made. I focused on capturing 'fresh' impressions, rather than producing 'polished' notes (Emerson et al 1995: 46). I constantly reflected on the context in which my observations had been made, as a way of grappling with the deeper meanings and significance certain comments and conversations had, as well as trying to disentangle whether my involvement in that context had led to a particular idea being expressed, and dissect why and how I was interpreting events. The meanings of these sometimes only became apparent later through reflection, because when immersed in a context aspects of life that are significant can become innocuous because of their familiarity. For example, the significance of fictive kinship became so ingrained in how I interacted, that I easily forgot to reflect on the meanings denoted by the terms used.

Significant attention was given to validating the emerging research findings, and this was a continuous process that occurred via various methods throughout the research. Four methods can in particular be highlighted: first, modes of daily validation; second,

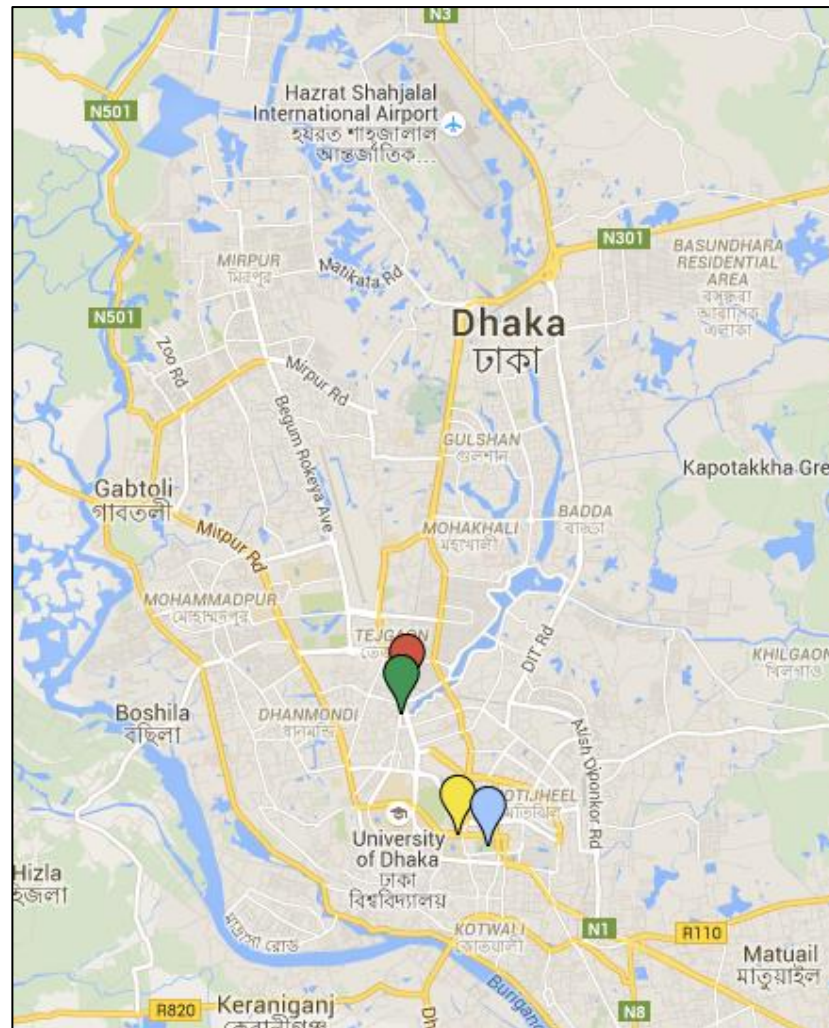
comparative analysis across different research contexts; third, formal research with research participants, including key informants; and fourth, presentations to and discussions with relevant organisations and individuals. In practice the research was highly iterative in that arguments and findings presented here have developed slowly over the course of a year, with points of data being gathered, verified and nuanced. Behind the data presented, for example cases or quotes to support arguments, is therefore months of attempts to understand and then verify the dynamics observed and described to me. This entailed a range of processes, for example engaging people in discussion about a topic from different angles, repeat lines of questioning or conversation on different occasions, validating a finding through multiple sources, and checking to see whether the analysis I was developing was correct with research participants. As cross cutting themes and arguments emerged, new findings, sources, events and relationships were put in relation to these. If they did not align, then I critically assessed why this was the case, whether my analysis was incorrect, whether it offered an important counterpoint, or whether it could reasonably be explained in another way, and then I adjusted ideas and continued research and triangulation. Hence arguments fell by the wayside as I found new ways to better explain my observations. Where disagreements remained I have often noted this in the text in subsequent chapters.

A further means by which data was collected and emerging findings built and validated, was through extending research to other contexts. From January to April 2015 I balanced continued engagement at Karwan Bazar with research in two primary further locations. Generalizability is a central concerns with ethnographic methods, and often identified as a limitation to the approach (Hammersley 1992). The purpose of extending the research was therefore to examine the validity of dynamics and relationships identified at the bazar in other contexts, as well as their relevance to people with different occupations. While in the bazar I had worked mainly with labourers in a vegetable supply/distribution chain, here I studied beggars and sewage workers (often referred to as *methor* or “*sweeper*”), and to a lesser extent scavengers (*tokai*) and small business people. I worked primarily around the Supreme Court area adjacent to Dhaka University and in Osmani Uddyan Park<sup>73</sup>. I chose these areas for a number of reasons: because of the greater occupational diversity as mentioned above; the fact that another researcher was concentrating in Kamalapur and I did not want to step on her toes; because the geography of these locations meant they were quieter at night; and because I had already established relationships with NGOs and people in these areas from 2013, as well as previous professional work.

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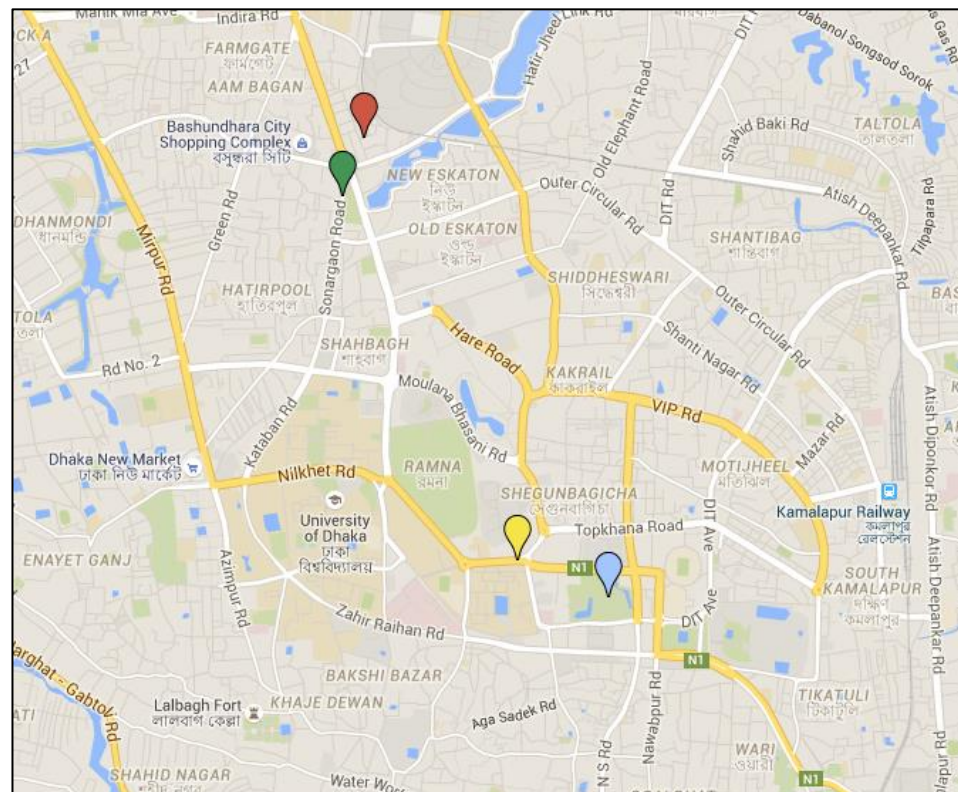
<sup>73</sup> I also briefly researched in the nearby Kamalapur station, Bangabandu stadium and the University itself. These areas were close to the park and pavement mentioned above, and hence I opportunistically visited them on a number of occasions to explore – in basic terms – some of the ideas around intermediation explored in this thesis.

FIGURE 2: MAP OF KEY RESEARCH SITES IN DHAKA



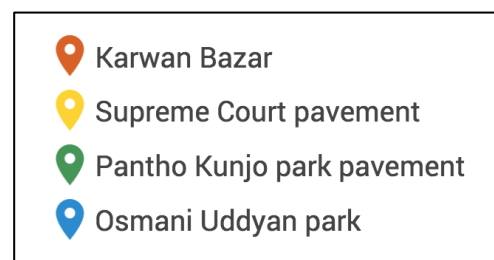
Source: google maps

FIGURE 3: CLOSE UP MAP OF RESEARCH LOCATIONS



Source: google maps

FIGURE 4: KEY FOR FIGURES 2 AND 3



Whereas in the bazar and on Pantho Kunjo pavement I had worked uniquely alone (with the exception of bringing a friend with me on a couple of occasions) at the pavement around the Supreme Court and in Osmani Uddyan park I decided to hire an assistant whom I recruited from the university. We worked together for around 20 days, mainly translating interviews (as described more below), and in some cases conducting interviews together. Having not worked with assistant from the beginning I found the transition difficult. Elsewhere Cons (2014) has examined the researcher-assistant relationships in detail in a Bangladeshi context. As he notes, these dependencies are ‘conditioned by the peculiarities of the dynamic between specific



researchers and specific research assistants' (Cons 2014: 377). I found that in practice greater clarity in understanding was sometimes outweighed by the disadvantages of having relationships to my research context mediated so directly. I felt it compromised my ability to emotionally connect in the research context, the balance between leading and following the conversation was difficult to attain, and that further obligations arose from engaging in such a formal way. In practice I then continued working in these areas alone, however continued with an assistant in more formal contexts (with research participants in NGO centres for example). Similar to in Karwan Bazar, around the Supreme Court and Osmani Uddyan Park I tried to 'hang out' as much as possible, getting a sense of the area, making contacts, and slowly piecing together people's experiences and perceptions about the local social/political landscape<sup>74</sup>.

The third means of data validation in the field was through using formal research methods with research participants and key informants. I introduced a more structured approach to research during the last three months of research. I had been disincentivised to conduct more formal research at Karwan Bazar because I perceived it as threatening the casual and thus far insightful approach I had relied upon, and also because the logistics of doing so were problematic. For the majority of people who did not spend time or even pass through an NGO centre, it was very difficult to find a quiet space that was comfortable and private. I found no solution to this problem. There were a few instances with people living near the Supreme Court where I was able to conduct formal work, in one case I found a quiet corner at the back of Curzon Hall, a nearby university building. Similarly at Karwan Bazar, there were occasions when the bazar was quiet and I could find time behind a bus or car, or sitting at a side of the market, to interview members of the *jupri* group for example. Through the *Aparajeyo* centre I had good relationships with staff, teenagers and young adults who used it. Choosing teenagers I already knew well<sup>75</sup>, I conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews focused on their experiences of intermediation and perception of events witnessed (documented particularly in chapter eight). The relationships I had already established with these teenagers enabled me to be more direct, as I often knew who they were associated with for example. It was clear however that they were nonetheless not always open with me about, for example, stealing, drug dealing and more extreme forms of violence<sup>76</sup>.

Similarly, I conducted fifteen semi-structured open interviews mainly with women in shelters under the *Amrao Manush* project, focusing on their experiences of intermediation, and their perceptions of the hierarchies I had observed relating to beggars and sewer workers, given that many partly lived in these areas. The purpose

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<sup>74</sup> In terms of validation, earlier in November 2015 I had also travelled to Kolkata, India, for a week and briefly explored some of these issues on the streets there. Given the brevity of the trip, I only gained limited insight into some of the more party political issues relating to intermediation, however findings from Dhaka relating to 'defiled surpluses' (explored in chapter nine) resonated closely here.

<sup>75</sup> In practice this included most of the children who were of teenager age and who used the centre.

<sup>76</sup> Labourers in the *jupri* group for example had told me about how some of the boys continued to be thieves, which they did not open up about in the context of formal interviews.



of these interviews was to explore some of the themes that had emerged through the research to date. I conducted the majority of the interviews alone, however all were transcribed working with an assistant, enabling me to better appreciate the nuance of the expression, the significance of particular words used<sup>77</sup>. In these interviews I personally asked each participant if they would like to be involved, was explicit about the purpose of my research, and informed them that if they did not want to answer a question it was not a problem. In practice, some people did not want to participate, some refused to answer questions, and some finished the interviews mid-way for a variety of reasons (fear of or unwillingness to talk about the topics and time constraints). In some cases, I was able and deemed it appropriate to follow up the topic with the participant informally at a later date. An ethical issue encountered here was that of confidentiality. I made sure that discussions were held in quiet, private spaces and that recordings taken were safely secured. The names of all respondents have been anonymised in this thesis, although given the relevance of context to understanding the arguments, locations have been given, as should already be clear<sup>78</sup>.

In the final two months, alongside the field research above I also had conversations and conducted interviews with key informants including local university professors, lawyers, a number of NGOs, activists, and journalists – particularly crime reporters - from major media outlets including The Daily Star, The Dhaka Tribune and ATN Bangla. This helped historically contextualise some of the dynamics and processes I was observing and that had been described to me. Finally, overlapping with the discussion above, presentations and conversations with relevant organisations and individuals provided a means by which I validated key research findings. I returned to Dhaka for a month in November-December 2015 and gave two presentations, one at Concern Worldwide to staff leading the *Amrao Manush* programme; and second, to staff at the BRAC Institute for Governance and Development (BIGD). These helped nuance and supported key arguments developed. In a further attempt to provide some historical contextualisation to the work, and to the dynamics I had observed, I spent around three weeks conducting archival research at the Bangladesh National Archives in Dhaka and later at the India Office at the British Library, London<sup>79</sup>. At the British Library I used the various digital catalogues (online, archival, India Office Select materials and maps) searching through sources listed as connected to ‘Dacca’, from which I selected and reviewed those appearing most relevant. In Dhaka, the organisation of the archives and lack of digitalisation made the task far more difficult, and I relied heavily on the judgement of staff.

At the point of leaving the field I thus had data from a wide range of sources: a field diary from over a year; semi-structured interviews; notes from conversations and interviews with key informants; a short ‘qualitative survey of perceptions’; photos and

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<sup>77</sup> To do this I also used a second assistant who had been my Bangla teacher.

<sup>78</sup> Key historical figures, for example the names of famous gangsters have also not been anonymised.

<sup>79</sup> I also conducted research at The Asiatic Society centres in both Dhaka and Kolkata, as well as the National Library of India in Kolkata, though found only limited relevant resources.

photocopies of documents found during archival research; NGO and other policy documents I had accumulated along the way; and secondary sources from the media, particularly relating to the *mastan* figures I had heard of. After returning from Bangladesh, I set about analysing the entire corpus of data. Two tasks were paramount in the process of analysis: first, that the data was coherently organised; and second, that I built arguments on a fair representation of my data. It is important to acknowledge that I began coding my field diary from Bangladesh in early 2015, and this analysis served as the basis for focusing the remaining period of research. At this stage, rather than coding select portions, I coded all of the data available according to people, intermediaries and events, and divided by the different areas in which I studied. At this stage I ‘open coded’, in effect highlighting both ‘codes’ and ‘categories’, as in subjects and ‘fields’ of subjects (Saldana 2009: 9)<sup>80</sup>. This was guided by the overarching framework explored in chapter two, with attention to mapping specific resources in relation to the actors deemed important in the research contexts, in line with the approach of Ribot and Peluso (2003).

Approaching my data post-Bangladesh I revisited all of my initial coding, again in light of the theoretical framework developed, but with a greater sense of distance from my research environment. I recoded my entire data set again according to research contexts, people, intermediaries and events, but also with prominent dynamics to these relationships and forms of negotiation. Coding and analysis were iterative processes: through coding, patterns emerged across sources, which helped form nascent arguments and responses to my research questions, and influenced subsequent coding. Coding was then a ‘cyclical act’, interacting with analysis (Saldana 2009: 8). Significant attention was given to whether arguments that had been developed through the fieldwork and early analysis, held true against the complete data set. In practice this meant acknowledging or accounting for inconsistencies, demonstrating sufficient nuance to relationships or processes, and judging which finding I had been able to sufficiently verify through a number of sources, and which finding were insufficiently established to merit inclusion or consideration in the thesis. Exceptions to patterns in my dataset were of particular note, in that they enabled me to highlight the limits or nuance in key dynamics, and in cases further substantiated the patterns they were an exception to. The data presented in this thesis, the cases focused upon or quotes, are intended to exemplify common findings across my research contexts, and effort has been made to emphasise the make clear the extent to which findings can be generalised this through the empirical chapters.

A practical principle when conducting analysis was then a readiness to abandon arguments that I liked, but which greater reflection on my data suggested were not valid. This is of course an ethical as well as intellectual concern, as it relates to

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<sup>80</sup> Rather than using qualitative data software, I chose to use Microsoft word with headers and sub-headers for different fields and subjects. This meant that the same data was often entered into a number of sections, however I perceived it as a more straightforward and intuitive approach than using qualitative data analysis software (NVivo for example).

representation. Izaz, a beggar at the High Court, responded to a question by me about hierarchy among beggars, which illustrated the significance of representation:

*Everyone eats from his own earnings. I eat from my own earning. You eat from your own earning. Some people spread defamation (bodnam) that beggars have to give a lot of money. It's rubbish (boa kotha). It's creating a false "case". One guy creating a false case about another. Do you understand? People say there's one beggar who made a 15 storey building. He made that building by working. Did he make the building by theft? He made the house by working hard. He didn't make the building by stealing. It's only defamation, they write in the newspapers here and there.*

This quote points to the fact that people who cannot represent themselves to the wider world are extremely vulnerable to stereotype and mischaracterisation, as explored early in the next chapter. The intention of this thesis has been to honestly and credibly portray social order from the perspective of the *kangali*, however it is important to acknowledge there were significant challenges to validating certain findings and providing sufficient depth of understanding in specific areas. Difficulties were partly due to the sensitivity of specific research topics, and therefore research findings pertained to subjects that were inherently harder to access, but also partly due to the limitations to the methodology chosen and my ability as a researcher. Surveying the thesis to come, there are a number of particular events or dynamics witnessed where further validation would be beneficial. In particular, the episodes of violence analysed in chapter eight (involving the Awami League, police and bombings on behalf of the BNP) were only portrayed to me by labourers within or closely connected to the *jupri* group. I was unable to gain insight into how their rivals, the police or Awami League politicians perceived these events. More generally within the *jupri* group, the precise relationships and agreements between the *jupri* group and the BNP were only explained to me in general terms. When working with the beggar leader Habib, further insight would have been useful to understand how he maintained his status, and whether he had relationships to more senior local actors such as the police for example.

The inability to understand these dynamics was partly due to the sensitivity of the topics and my inability to negotiate access to them, but was also a function of the methodology chosen. My focus was on providing an emic account of social order from the perspective of the *kangali*, however to understand many of the wider intermediaries and organisations in which they function independent of their relationship with the *kangali* (political parties for example), requires an approach that begins with these actors and structures and focuses at this level. Certain research findings also pertain to much larger phenomenon within Bangladesh's political settlement and while a certain level of depth can be gathered from the approach taken, further research is required at a higher level and with a broader set of actors, to understand these in greater detail. This is particularly relevant for what I argue to be the decline of *mastan* gangs from the early 2000s; the increasing power of the Awami League witnessed just prior to, during and subsequent to fieldwork; and the systems

of toll/extortion collection (*chanda*), which are ubiquitous across Dhaka. I had planned to return to Dhaka six months after completing research in April 2015, with the intention of explaining a synthesis of my analysis to people with whom I had researched, however was unable to do so due to a deteriorated security situation for foreigners in Bangladesh. A further limitation that is important to highlight, is that I as a male researcher found it far easier to analyse the dynamics of intermediation in the context of men. This was partly a function of the fact that men have a closer reliance on the types of intermediaries described in this thesis, by virtue of working in sectors where work is organised collectively, however even in instances where this is the case for women – sex work for example – I found it difficult to access. These limitations all point to areas for future research.

#### 4.3. CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the methodology used in this thesis to examine social order from the perspective of the *kangali* in Dhaka city. The focus has been on analysing the research experience itself, as well as demonstrating processes of validation for findings and arguments made. The descriptions of the research experience suggest that the framework of intermediation is relevant also to understanding the dynamics of conducting research. In relation particularly to the *jupri* group, I as a researcher had to establish access on a personal basis, the terms of these relationships were continuously negotiated, and my role within the group connected to a capability for violence. To the extent that ethnography has to grapple with the terms on which social order is based as described in chapter two, it can then also be understood as a political process. This chapter has also introduced key research sites, people and groups, and these are all more comprehensively discussed in the next chapter.

### 5. KARWAN BAZAR AND THE *KANGALI*

This chapter introduces the places and people at the centre of this thesis, both of which have been briefly discussed in the preceding description of methodology. While urban research has gained some momentum in Bangladesh over recent decades, the groups of urban poor people studied are often limited to those living in large, well-established and partially serviced *bosti*. This thesis focuses on groups of people who to date have been less well examined; in particular those living in the open or in the most basic *bosti* found on some of Dhaka's pavements, parks, and occasionally by the sides of railway lines. These people are often classified in international discourse through terms such as 'squatters', the 'homeless' and 'street dwellers'. Attention in this chapter is given to how these groups of people have been categorised, labelled and studied, as this reflects prominent conceptualisations about how they are situated within, and therefore relate to, the social order. The public discourse in Bangladesh around these people being 'rootless' and 'floating' is argued to be problematic, a line of argument

built through the following chapters and returned to in the conclusion. I choose to use the term *kangali* (destitute, the needy) to refer to these people, as it is the only term I encountered that people living in these contexts use to label themselves. This is acknowledged as a contentious term and discussed in more detail. Before these areas are explored, the primary and secondary research sites focused on in this thesis are introduced. Where possible some brief history of these locations is sketched, prominent characters introduced, and key socio-economic dynamics discussed from the perspective of the *kangali*. Through introducing the places and people at the focus of this thesis, this chapter sets the stage for an analysis of the dynamics of intermediation and social order through the microcosm of the *kangali* living in a bazar, on some pavements and in a park.

## 5.1. KARWAN BAZAR, SOME PAVEMENTS AND A PARK

### 5.1.1. KARWAN BAZAR

Karwan Bazar is a large wholesale market (*arot*) at the centre of Dhaka, nestled next to the city's only north-south train line, sitting alongside the heart of Bangladesh's media industry, adjacent to a five star hotel, surrounded by businesses, and around the corner from one of Bangladesh's largest and most upmarket shopping centres. This section introduces the bazar, its history, socio-economic hierarchy, and the people at the centre of this study.

Despite the bazar's prominence today as the country's largest vegetable wholesale market, it rarely appears in either historical records or contemporary analyses from Dhaka, and what can be learned about the bazar's history has to be gleaned from these infrequent sources, as well as the recollections of elderly local residents and workers. The first reference to the area now called Karwan Bazar comes from descriptions of the *Khwaja Ambar Mosque*, built in 1680 under the instruction of Khwaja Ambar<sup>81</sup>, the chief eunuch of Shaista Khan, the Mughal ruler of Bengal at the time. The mosque can still be found on the western side of the bazar, painted in a gaudy green, overshadowed by its modern counterpart, and partly hidden behind billboards and walls plastered with political posters. In 1776 the renowned colonial geographer James Rennell produced a map of Dhaka, highlighting a mosque in this location, with gardens of the French and Dutch communities to its northeast and northwest respectively, suggesting a rather different setting to what can be found today. An entry on 'Banglapedia'<sup>82</sup> states that the origins of the bazar's name come from a 'Marwari merchant' called Karwan Singh who established a market there in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>83</sup>. This claim is unsupported, and in fact the name appears to come from the historical presence of a caravanserai, also transliterated from Persian into English as 'Karwansara'. As across the Mughal world, caravanserais were most often small

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<sup>81</sup> Later titled 'Khidmatgar Khan' in 1704 after his predecessor (Faruqui 2012: 240).

<sup>82</sup> The online encyclopedia for Bangladesh.

<sup>83</sup> One long standing resident claimed that the name came from the river Karwan, which used to run by the bazar.

compounds containing an inn, as well as a mosque and bazar, used by travellers for security, to rest and restock (Campbell 2011). In Bengali a caravanserai is termed a *katra*. At some point this *katra* would have therefore have been used similarly to the famous *boro* and *choto katra* that lie in ruins in old Dhaka<sup>84</sup>.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the mosque, like much of Dhaka, was in a dilapidated state (Taylor 1840)<sup>85</sup>. We can assume the caravanserai fell into disuse at some point in the 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century as Taylor (1840: 295) writes that ‘there are no serais in the district, and the few persons that travel by land, therefore find board and lodging at... Akharas, or at the shops of the Moodees or dealers in grain’. Interestingly however it continued to be known by some as a *katra*, more specifically as *bhagtiya katra*. *Bhagtiya* means a ‘dancing boy’ in Hindustani (Shakespeare 1834) and Wise (1883: 352) wrote that many of the ‘nars’, who were boys or girls known for dancing or music ‘inhabit an old Sarae, or caravansary, called Bhagtiya Katra, built in the seventeenth century by an eunuch named Khwajah ‘Ambar’. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the term ‘Karwan’ was being used to refer to the neighbourhood. Wise refers to the Raj-Mahallia Kumhars, a group of potters coming originally from ‘Raj-mahall’<sup>86</sup>, who lived in 200 houses in Dhaka in ‘Ja’farganj, Sultanganj, Rai Bazar, and Karwan, suburbs of Dacca’.

There is then a significant gap in what can be gleaned from historical sources, and what can be learnt from the memories and stories of people from the area. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, goods were transported into the city principally by canal and river, with only a few brought by train (Allen 1912). With the growth of the city northwards, it is therefore probable that a more significant bazar emerged on the site as its strategic position grew. For decades Karwan Bazar has been Dhaka’s largest vegetable wholesale market (*arot*), attracting buyers, sellers and labour from throughout the country. Fifty or so years ago, the market was smaller, containing a few wholesalers at the south west side of its current location, adjacent to the then newly paved main road Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue<sup>87</sup> which connected the city centre to what used to be the city’s airport in Tejgaon. At the time, the rail line that runs alongside its east towards Kamalapur, cut through towards the west, before making its way down to Gulistan. It was flanked by waterways, and nearby areas such as *Panthapath*, where the large shopping centre Bashundara City stands today, was a water body. The area was largely open with no significant buildings except the mosque, surrounded by paddy fields and jungle. One labourer I knew who grew up nearby described the female ghosts (*petni*) in the jungle, and having been scared to go to the toilet there.

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<sup>84</sup> Bradley-Birt (1906: 268) notes how Bara Katra built by Shah Shuja, the son of the man who built the Taj Mahal in Agra, was never used for its intended purpose as his palace, and was rather used as a caravanserai, ‘a public halting-place where travellers and the poor might find rest and shelter’.

<sup>85</sup> Though even in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the well dug there by Khwaja Ambar, as well as the nearby bridge across the canal ‘Iskatau Khal’ were still in use (Allen 1912: 178).

<sup>86</sup> This is probably the town Rajmahal in current day Jharkhand, close to the Bangladeshi border

<sup>87</sup> This is one of the main road’s running north to south in Dhaka. Originally built with funds from Queen Elizabeth II as an elderly local resident remembered it.

From at least the 1970s the area contained Dhaka's largest truck stand, sizeable boat launch steps (*ghat*), a wholesale vegetable and fish market, and a hawkers market. As is well remembered by some locals, rural hardship led tens of thousands of people to pour into Dhaka in search of work following the Liberation War and then famine of 1974; and there are still labourers at the bazar today who came during this period. A long standing resident who grew up in one of the few residential properties in the area, described there being over 10,000 people living in the open or in makeshift shelters between Karwan Bazar and Tejgaon (just north of the bazar) alone in the late 70s and early 80s. The vast majority worked as *coolie* (the labourers who carry goods on their heads, also called *minti* and sometimes *labour*). Whereas today goods arrive by truck, and are often transported by rickshaw van (flat backed rickshaws), previously almost everything came by water, with lines of labourers working in chains transporting goods from the boat launch running adjacent to the railway line. As this resident described it

*there were hundreds of minti, they would spoil all the roads of Karwan Bazar by shitting and pissing everywhere... They came from the villages, and they slept on the road-launch steps [rasta ghat]. They would lie on the slopes next to the rail lines.*

Some people settled in the area, building more permanent shelters overhanging these water bodies themselves, others found somewhere to live in *bosti* elsewhere in Dhaka, while others continued to sleep where they could, often at the side of the road under mosquito nets.

Today people continue to come from all over the country to survive and seek opportunities at the bazar. As one labourer put it, *you can come from Comilla, Mymensing, Barisal, Rangpur*<sup>88</sup> – *you can come from anywhere and stay here*. Many people migrate temporarily or seasonally to find work, financing rural lives with urban money. Some people who live at the bazar have separated from their families, either as a child or an adult, and built a life around the bazar, while others have been born at or nearby the bazar and grown up there. The bazar has developed from the descriptions heard of previous decades. Alongside the thousands of people seeking a living through their labour, there are today hundreds of wholesalers filling large tin, brick and some two-storey buildings. As well as this, hundreds of small businesses trade on the roadsides, and the streets are full of trucks, vans, and the cars of nearby high-end office workers. Despite these changes, the bazar and nearby *bosti* still stand in contrast to the wealthy business and media hubs adjacent.

Life at the bazar focuses around the movement of goods, in particular vegetables and fruit, but also meat and fish, and it is often people's relationship to these goods and their movement that defines their status at the bazar. The three most common types of labour are: *coolie* (as described above), the "*helper*" (those helping unload trucks of

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<sup>88</sup> These are districts or divisions at different ends of Bangladesh.

goods, passing them to the *coolie*), and the rickshaw van drivers (those taking sacks of goods from trucks into the bazar or elsewhere on a flat backed rickshaw). These are all known as *sramik* (labourers, workers). Many younger boys and women who live there are scavengers (*tokai*), some children and teenagers are thieves (*chur*), a small number of women are sex workers (*potita*) and there is also a small number of beggars (*bikkuk*). It is important to note that wages are perceived as high at the bazar - people spoke of rickshaw van drivers earning 2000 *taka* a day in the past, and even today they can earn up to around 1500 *taka* a day in some cases, though more generally it ranges from 300-800 *taka*<sup>89</sup>.

Labourers, beggars, sex workers and scavengers, associate with particular areas of the market for living and working. To understand the relationship between people and spaces it is useful to start by recognising that, as a labourer called Rakib put it to me, *day and night are different worlds at Karwan Bazar*. By day, the market is busy with retailers selling the goods bought from wholesalers the previous night. *Coolie* work primarily alone, taking small jobs for individual customers, often in competition with other *coolie*. By night however labourers primarily operate collectively under the leadership of *sardar* (as discussed in chapter three) and this is when the majority of people work. Unlike most areas of Dhaka, and similar to markets worldwide, the bazar is busier by night than by day. Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue often has back-to-back traffic until late evening as trucks pour in from the country delivering goods. Specific trucks unload at specific areas of the market, with different areas corresponding to different groups of labour and wholesalers (*arotdar*). Labourers then transport goods to the relevant wholesalers, before they are repackaged and sold on<sup>90</sup>. This is known locally as a *bhag niyom*, a ‘system of division’, the basic principle of which from the perspective of labourers is: *we can’t take their goods, and they can’t take ours*. By night the *coolie* are all led by *sardar*, as are many, but not all, rickshaw van drivers. Across the bazar different spaces are associated with particular groups of labour, and in practice each area is further sub-divided. Some people distinguish by area, often identified with a prominent building, others identify by lane (*goli*), while others identify by group of labour, making distinctions difficult to delineate. Labourers roughly distinguish five areas: *la vinci* (named after the adjacent hotel), *was*a (named after the large government office by that name), *market* (directly south of WASA), *sonargaon* (the southern entrance to Karwan Bazar, facing the five star Sonargaon hotel) and the *rail line* (to the north east).

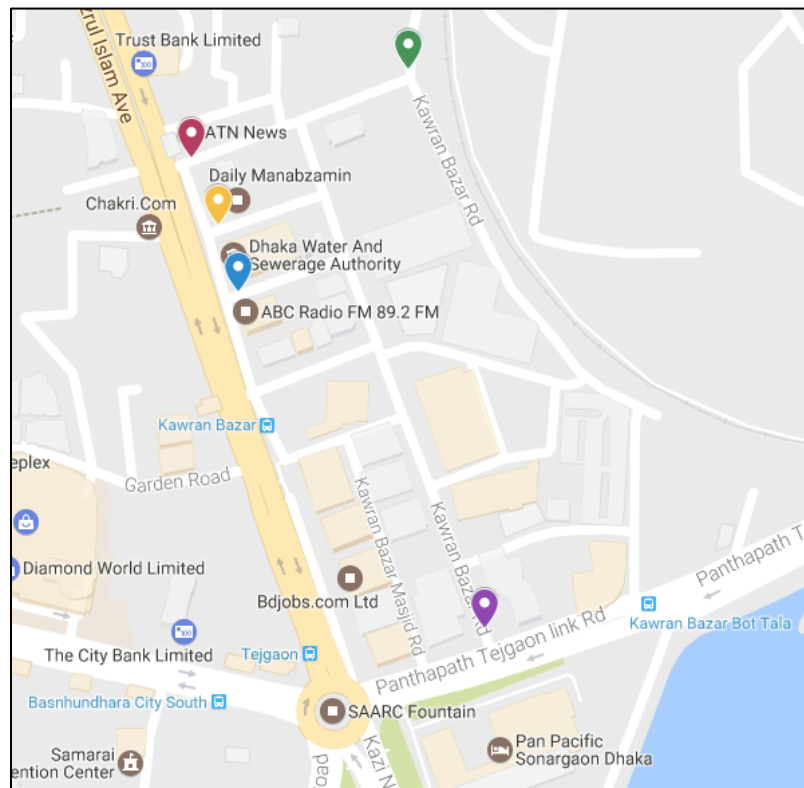
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<sup>89</sup> Historically Karwan Bazar was the only wholesale market in Dhaka however today there are many others which some labourers at the bazar explain have led to their wages depreciating. One labourer at Karwan Bazar Liton once told me (exaggerating to some extent in all probability) that *before van drivers could earn 5000 taka in one day. There was so many goods. Now there is other areas such as Jatrabari, Gazipur, the same goods go to different areas now*.

<sup>90</sup> The *arotdar* (wholesalers), or commission agents as they were known in English (and now Bangla) from at least the mid 19th century (Lewis 1868: 25), typically take five per cent commission, and today are sometimes lambasted by the labourers as “cheater”. Even 150 years ago ‘bepáris complain[ed] bitterly’ amount the arrangement with *arotdar* (Lewis 1868: 25). *Bepari* here refers to the middlemen who buy vegetables in rural areas and transport them to urban areas.

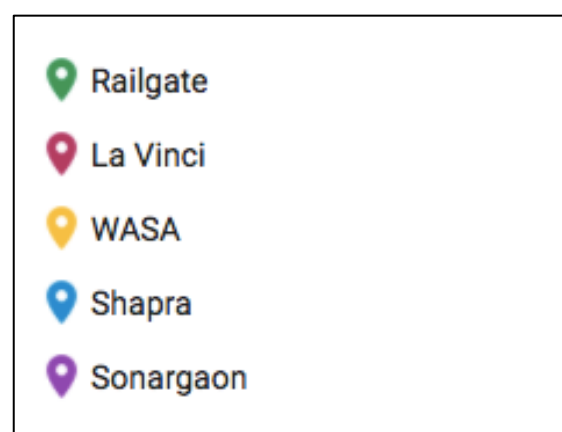


FIGURE 5: MAP OF KARWAN BAZAR WORK AREAS



*Source: google maps*

FIGURE 6: KEY FOR FIGURE 5



Alongside the labourers weaving their way through the crowds to deliver goods, are hundreds of people sleeping after a days work, or awaiting work later that night. With the wholesale market and many public areas crammed, those who sleep at night often

do so on shop verandas, down quieter lanes, or in the entranceways to businesses and government offices. By comparison those who sleep during the day often do so in the market, in *mess*<sup>91</sup> above the market, in corners tucked away, or behind parked vehicles<sup>92</sup>. At night, many *coolie* sleep slumped in the baskets they use for transporting goods, sometimes alongside the main road, and the image has caught on in popular imagination of the bazar. As trucks arrive, women, children and labourers begin hovering around them. Any loose vegetables that fall out of bags or over the side are quickly picked and fed into bags or pouches made with the women's *salwa kameez*, and meanwhile any spilt chilis are quickly swept up. After a night's work the women and children – and sometimes other members of their family – wash the vegetables, often cutting them sideways to demonstrate to potential customers that they are fresh, and bunch them up into piles on the street selling for small sums (usually 10 *taka*<sup>93</sup> a pile). Some travel north to the nearby *fokini bazar* (beggars market) under Tejgaon flyover, while those at the bazar sell either along the paths between the main markets or on the land of wholesalers.

The experiences of one particular group of labourers at Karwan Bazar are explored in this thesis: the rickshaw van drivers associated with the *jupri lane* (*jupri goli*) just south of WASA, and referred to locally as a group by the term *jupri*. *Jupri* means a shack or shanty. The group are named such because, according to one of their members Abul, *before there used to be jute sacks and bamboo pillars and on the top tin made shed, that's why they used to call it jupri*. Others said it was because the way in which they live at Karwan Bazar looks like a *jupri*, with mosquito nets forming small shelters. They identify clearly with the name and are referred to as such by outsiders. More broadly they are identified with WASA, as they work and many live, to the south and east side of the building. There are around 70 labourers in the group, with three leaders: Rubel, Parvez and “*Mission*” Azad, about whom more will be learnt in subsequent chapters. Labourers within the group who I was particularly close to include Nazir, Abul, Liton, Shumon, Shamim, Salam, Rana, Abdul, Rakib, Mohammed and Shakib. Unlike other groups of labour at the bazar, most of the group (*the best of them*, as Rubel put it) have grown up at the bazar, moving between the various NGO centres in their youth, before getting too old to legitimately stay there, and being old enough to be a rickshaw van driver. All of the labourers (and leaders) listed above with the exception of Liton, had grown up at the bazar.

For at least a couple of decades there is a history of NGO run centres for “street children” at the bazar, opening and closing in funding cycles, and cohort after cohort of children have grown up partly within or between these. There are currently two such centres at or adjacent to the bazar – a *Sajida Foundation* centre sheltering women and children at night (teenage boys sometimes sleep there during the day) and an *Aparajeyo Bangladesh* centre to the north, where teenage boys can sleep during the

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<sup>91</sup> Communal sleeping quarters where people pay 15-20 taka night to sleep on the floor.

<sup>92</sup> With the exception of the mess, or the occasional shop floor, people sleep for free (see chapter nine).

<sup>93</sup> *Taka* is the Bangladeshi currency.

day. The friendships and groups formed here continue as people grow up and into the adult world of labour. These networks are essential to survival, as Shumon explained it to me:

*You've grown up with you mother and father right? They were the ones who made sure you stayed well, who fed you. We're different. We didn't have our mothers or fathers that's why we all live together here. This is like our family*

As older labourers within the group have grown up, got married and had children, many have moved into the larger *bosti*. Some have retained, re-built, or created greater links to villages, while others continue to live at the bazar. Some men have adopted the home village of their wives, calling it their *bari* (birthplace, home)<sup>94</sup>. The notion of a *bari* (ancestral, often village home) has a fundamental place for people's identities in Bangladesh. It provides a moral and cultural anchoring, and therefore knowing the *bari* of someone is often an important way of categorising and placing them. Though the vast majority of urban dwellers live away from their *bari*, the socio-economic and cultural ties that stem from this identity are often critical to finding security and work. In fact many groups of labour at Karwan Bazar are associated with particular districts of Bangladesh. There is then a close association between being disconnected from ones family – and therefore one's *bari* - and joining the *jupri* group. Teenagers and young men slowly join their ranks, often in small groups coming from the same cohort, or "*batch*" as it is known locally, at the centres. Of the areas at the bazar, it is through this group that those growing up in the centres are most likely to become rickshaw van drivers. Teenage boys at the cusp of joining the group occupy different worlds: that of the child deemed to be needing support and protection in NGO centres, and that of the bazar, where they are learning to survive in a competitive and often violent environment. By day they watch cartoons, sleep, play fight under the eyes of staff at the Aparajeyo centre, or play cricket in the nearby Sher-E-Bangla Nagar Park, while at night they prove themselves, looking and acting like adults: smoking cigarettes, getting into fights, building and proving their capacity to operate in an adult world. Some of the teenagers heard from in this thesis include Zakir, Akash, Mamun, Sayeed, Arif, Golap, Monir, Nijam, Chondon and Salman.

As the *jupri* group work at night, many of them sleep intermittently throughout the day either to the south of WASA - lying on their rickshaw vans, sleeping on boxes, or in small alcoves at the bottom of the building behind the buses and cars that park there during office hours - or along the east side of WASA next to the *arot* and trucks, sleeping on boxes under tarpaulin sheeting. While night is for work, much of the day is passed in normal routines – chatting, sleeping, smoking mariquana, eating from one of the local street carts (Shumon, one of the labourers, owns a cart selling *kichuri* next to WASA). The few men with their wives there or nearby are cooked for, and the women use makeshift spaces on the footpath, gutter or parking area to light a fire and

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<sup>94</sup> This resonates with Indra and Buchignani's (1997) argument that in response to crises, families in rural Bangladesh utilize the kinship ties women within the household can make claims on, in order to re-establish access to land. This was known as *uthuli* in the context they studied.

cook. The group often play ludo, and behind the large company buses and parked cars, lots of boards can sometimes be seen laid out on the floor, people engrossed in the game for hours. Mobile phones provide entertainment, people with touch screens (*“touch mobile”* as it is known locally) buy memory cards from shops (and swap them with others) that come ready loaded with films and TV series. Bollywood action films are a favourite. More so in the past than in the present, the group also gamble, but given it is illegal they are careful not to show cards round much during the day, and have found a few obscure corners which are hidden from the main roads at Karwan Bazar to play. Sometimes they and others play in the vegetable trucks themselves, easily hidden from street level. The bazar itself also provides entertainment, and is a hub for travelling entertainers, sexual health medicines, charms, and the occasional extorting elephant.

As a side business the labourers buy mariquana in Dhaka’s largest open drugs market *Karwan Bazar rail line bosti*, which is adjacent to the market, and then sell it to nearby professionals. From late-evening until around 8am women (and less so men) huddle outside their homes either side of the railway line over large baskets holding mounds of mariquana. Hidden from view they sell harder and more expensive drugs such as *yabba* and heroin<sup>95</sup>. Of the *jupri* group it is Shumon who is mostly responsible for travelling to the rail line, buying the drugs (being careful not to be caught and hence extorted by nearby police). They then use scissors to cut up the large buds and branches, wrapping up 20 or 30 taka packets in pieces of scrap paper. They sell it mostly to people in the media (from ATN Bangla for example), saving people of higher status from making the highly conspicuous journey to the railway line. Drugs is one reason why Karwan Bazar is infamous, and its reputation has built through decades of close association with major crimes, gangs and violence and sex work, as will be explored more in subsequent chapters. There is less sex work apparent today than in previous decades however. A small portion of this is street based, with some of the women sleeping at the *Sajida Foundation* by day, before beautifying themselves at the centre and working at night. There is also a large hotel – a *boarding* – to the north east of the market, used by lots of sex workers, with teenagers from the age of around 15 according to labourers in the *jupri* group.

#### 5.1.2. SOME PAVEMENTS AND A PARK

Substantial research was also conducted in a number of secondary locations, as described in the previous chapter. Three sites are of particular importance: a pavement adjacent to Pantho Kunjo park nearby Karwan Bazar, the pavement outside the Supreme Court, and Osmani Uddyan park which is next to the headquarters of Dhaka South City Corporation.

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<sup>95</sup> People also often consume the cough syrup phensedyl. Drugs are reportedly supplied primarily from Myanmar and India, and they pour into the market, being dealt and consumed there. According to the *jupri* group the network of vegetable trucks are used to conceal and deliver drugs around the country, and I have met rickshaw wallahs who come from elite neighbourhoods to buy drugs before selling it on (often to foreigners they tell me) around the elite neighbourhood Gulshan.

The pavement outside the Supreme Court holds one of, if not the largest concentration of disabled beggars, living together anywhere in the city. A local beggar leader Habib, about whom more will be discussed in the next chapter, described the area as being like a *fakir* “junction” (*a beggar’s junction*). Today hundreds of people – most of whom are beggars – sleep on the pavement outside the Supreme Court premises, however thousands of people previously lived there when they were allowed to sleep in the *mazar* grounds (which is contained inside the Supreme Court premises). The area used to be similar to Mirpur *mazar*, where music, stories and poetry are recited every night, and drugs consumed, however these activities have radically declined, particularly since the ‘International Crimes Tribunal’<sup>96</sup>. It is nonetheless still identified as a spiritual place, and one staff member at the *mazar* described seeing miracles there, including a man make a pigeon appear from his bare hands. The *mazar* – so tradition has it – is either based around the tomb of the Mughal governor Islam Khan Chisti, or that of a saint buried in 1590. In any case it is therefore likely that people have been begging there for hundreds of years. A number of people also described the area as being a recruitment ground for film companies to find actors to work as beggars or *pagol* (crazy people) in their films. Kichuri<sup>97</sup> is donated to the poor at lunchtime through the *mazar*, though some people complain that the *mazar* staff appropriate the money and best food which has been donated to the *mazar*. Locally powerful spiritual leaders are also seen as excluding locals from the benefits given to the followers of their particular strand of Sufism (*tarika*). In winter, students, business people and local associations often donate blankets, and the number of people living in the area suddenly swells to claim the donations.

Most of the beggars in the area are physically disabled and live in small wooden carts on wheels, which are pushed by an assistant. Assistants are most often young boys who are strong enough to push a cart but not yet teenagers. When a new assistant is needed they are collected from either *Kamalapur station* - another area where many *kangali* live (see Conticini 2005) - or an NGO club in *Aram Bagh*, both of which are to the East of the Supreme Court. Assistants normally receive half of the day’s income from begging, though some receive a monthly salary from the beggar. Some of the beggars also carry little sticks to discipline their assistants when they misbehave. Though they live outside the Supreme Court, they most often beg in other areas. According to Habib,

*there is a “map”, where you should go everyday, like on Friday today, it’s Supreme Court... Then another day it’s good to go to Shabagh, Press Club, Doynek Bangla Circle, Paltan Circle...*

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<sup>96</sup> Despite its name this is in fact a domestic war crimes tribunal established in 2009 to prosecute crimes committed during Bangladesh’s 1971 Liberation War. The understanding I have gathered from people living on the pavement, staff in the *mazar*, and nearby NGO workers, is that the government associate crowds of people living on the pavements as potentially harbouring terrorists, and their presence is therefore perceived a threat to national security.

<sup>97</sup> A popular Bangladeshi, and South Asian, meal made primarily from rice and lentils.

Most beggars have been at the Supreme Court for years if not decades, and have strong ties back to their village homes. As Habib described it to me: *everyone has their own children, they have to send back money. They have parents, everyone has someone.* Many of the beggars earn relatively high amounts of money, with the disabled beggars typically earning more than the non-disabled. For example Mohona, who now runs a small cigarette business, but used to live on the pavement and beg at the Supreme Court described her experience at the time: *I would earn 500, 600, 700, up to 1000 a day. All in 2 or 1 taka notes.* This livelihood is however precarious. Izaz, who is paralysed from the waist down and lives on the eastern side of the pavement described the adverse impact of recent evictions of street businesses:

*A lot of those shop owners gave me 5 taka, 10 taka. Now, none of them are here anymore. All of these have been destroyed. There used to be a lot of shops in Mogh bazar. Malibag rail gate. But there aren't anymore. If I went to the rail gate I would make 40 or 50 taka even before crossing the rail. Now, they don't even let a crow sit there. How can I do business there? They say "digital Bangladesh", but are there no beggars here?*<sup>98</sup>

Just east of the University and the Supreme Court, and next to Dhaka South City Corporation, is Osmani Uddyan Park. As well as being known as a public park, it is also known - as the English language newspaper *The Daily Star* (2008) put it - for vagabonds, floating people, addicts, beggars and prostitutes. The article also notes seeing a 'scantily clad demented person'<sup>99</sup>. People of different occupations shelter in the park at night, as they do in many nearby areas, including the *golap shah mazar* at the adjacent intersection, and further along at Bangabandu stadium. The NGO *Nari Maitree* run a nearby shelter under the *Amrao Manush* programme, which works particularly with women and children from the area. Within the park, the most prominent group are the *moyla* (waste, drain, sewer) workers, under the leadership of a *sardar* Jewel, about whom more will be explained in chapter seven. Their numbers vary between around 30 and 50, fluctuating with the season and work availability (*when there's more rain, we have more work*, Jewel put it to me simply). Most of the men have only worked there for about 4-5 years with the exception of an older member Neymar, nicknamed after the great Argentine footballer<sup>100</sup>, who has been there for twenty years. The group work on a contract basis for WASA, and are particularly busy in the rainy season when the drains require greater maintenance. Not all the members

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<sup>98</sup> It is interesting to note that Izaz here is referring to begging as a business. "*Digital Bangladesh*" is a government campaign to promote the ICT sector in the country, and is being referenced here ironically.

<sup>99</sup> The park is also known as being the home of the famous Bibi Mariam, one of the two cannons that had defended Dhaka in the Mughal period. One local story, which was apparently reported in newspapers though I heard from local people, also suggests a more gruesome past. The story goes that there used to be a man living in the wooded area of the park around 15 years ago. He had long scraggily hair and very long nails, and people were scared to even walk in front of him. He was found to have abducted children from a nearby slum, hidden them among the trees where he killed them and ate their livers. The story goes that he had previously worked in the mortuary at Dhaka Medical College before becoming a beggar, and when found, was beaten to death in front of the City Corporation building.

<sup>100</sup> The group play a lot of football in the park, and Neymar, the older member, is particularly skilled.

of the group support family elsewhere, and those that do are able – so they describe – to send back around 100 *taka* a day when they have work.

In the case of the three research sites thus far described – Karwan Bazar, the pavement next to the Supreme Court and Osmani Uddyan park – access to come and sleep there is generally open. As I widely heard – *anyone can stay here it's not a problem*. This is similar to many other areas across Dhaka, including major transport terminals, religious sites and outside sport stadiums. The final research site - the pavement adjacent to Pantho Kunjo park – is however different. On this pavement, like others across Dhaka, settlements are more than simply a mosquito net, but include plastic tarpaulin, small items of furniture and cooking utensils. These sites are often referred to locally as *bosti*, even if they are far less established and permanent shelters than seen in the larger slums of the city. Pantho Kunjo is across the roundabout southwest from Karwan Bazar. This is labelled as Sonargaon Road on Figure 3, and is historically where the train line passed through. Previously there was a more permanent *bosti* established on the site. By contrast with the previous research sites discussed, the pavement next to Pantho Kunjo park - like many other pavements across the city - is only accessible to people who are already connected to the communities who live there. This was often expressed to me in these terms: *unknown people can't come here, we won't accept them, we won't let them stay*. Having visited many such *bosti* on the pavements in Dhaka, in almost every case the footpath is clearly demarcated into home districts, such that people can say easily point to where a certain district's area stops and starts. Most often the people living there are from areas in the north of the country such as Jamalpur, Rangpur (particularly Lalmonihat), Bogra, Mymensing, and to a lesser extent Dinajpur and Sherpur. Koehlmoos et al (2009) found that 34 and 23 per cent of male and female 'street dwellers' respectively, lived where they did because 'others of same area of origin [are] staying in cluster area'. In the case of the pavement next to *Panto Kunjo park*, there are two communities from which people come – Jamalpur and Rangpur. It is inclusion in these networks that enables access to such spaces. Those living there often described hearing about the place in their village, hearing you did not need to pay rent, knowing someone from nearby, and deciding to make the journey. In these cases, the communities have built up slowly over the years. Parveen, who has lived at Pantho Kunjo for around 15 years, described the situation there

*People from the village came here first. They stayed 6-7 months then came back and told others. They took others to Dhaka, then these people came back and took others, that's how it slowly slowly grew here.*

Today the people living there do a variety of work. Many are scavengers, and keep their goods piled along the side of the pavement, waiting to sell in bulk for a higher price. Some of the men work as day labourers or in transport, while many women work as housemaids in nearby middle class apartments. Despite collectively not allowing others to come and sleep there, there is no clear sense of a leader in the *bosti*, and this is particularly because none of the work is organised collectively. A locally

powerful figure often identified however is Jahangir, described locally as a reformed *mastan*, a low level Awami League leader, and a former *bhangari dokan* (recycled goods shop) owner.

## 5.2. THE KANGALI: URBAN DISCOURSE AND DEBATES

### 5.2.1. BEING ‘ROOTLESS’, ‘FLOATING’ AND ‘KANGALI’

The people discussed in the previous section are rarely studied, with barely a handful of published academic papers even relating to them from Bangladesh. They are however the subject of strong characterisations in government discourses and public imagination. Attention to these is important as they represent dominant understandings about how these people are included within, and relate to, the social order. More generally, a focus on labelling is important, as it ‘refers to a relationship of power in that the labels of some are more easily imposed on people and situations than those of others’ (Wood 1985: 347). Labels are thus always embedded within wider relationships and inequalities of power, and prominent labels represent dominant ideas about how the world can or should be understood. The ubiquity and necessity for labels can lead to complacency about the understandings they are predicated upon and the values they promote. As Moncrieffe (2007: 1) argues, processes of labelling ‘continues wantonly, without contemplation of the politics involved and the potential adverse outcomes’.

In the context of urban Bangladesh a distinction is often made in both English and Bengali, between people living in the slum (*bosti*) or on the road/street (*rasta/pot*). It is common then to contrast ‘slum dwellers’ (*bosti-bashi*) on one hand, and ‘street-dwellers’ or ‘pavement-dwellers’ (Begum 1997) on the other<sup>101</sup>. In practice the urban poor can easily become equated with those people living in the *bosti* and research has overwhelmingly focused on such people. A recent review of ‘urban poverty in Bangladesh’ for example focuses entirely on the *bosti-bashi* (Banks 2012). This seems problematic in that it ignores those who are ‘urban’ and ‘poor’ but live outside the *bosti*. As Rahman (2011: 4) argues, urban poverty research in Bangladesh tends ‘to have a narrow focus on slums’. Referring to those outside the *bosti*, the World Bank (2007: 2) states that ‘further analysis is recommended on this subgroup among the poor’.

The distinction between the slum and street is not however as clear-cut as it can appear. The census of the urban poor conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) on and after the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2014 (which I observed at and near Karwan Bazar) categorised some people as living in *potho-bosti* (street slums). Those living adjacent to Pantho Kunjo park were for example categorised as such, and this resonates with the fact that people living there, and locals living nearby, often refer to this as a *bosti*,

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<sup>101</sup> These are sometimes referred to as *bosti-bashi* (slum dwellers) and *potho-bashi* (street dwellers), particularly within NGO circles.



despite it not looking like the *bosti* often studied by urban researchers<sup>102</sup>. Urban researchers in Bangladesh have arguably delineated ‘the slum’ to refer to a particular type of *bosti*, namely those which are comparatively developed in terms of physical and social infrastructure (or undeveloped compared to homes built from concrete and bricks). A *bosti* may refer to a brick built building, serviced with gas, electricity and water, but it can also apply to a string of tarpaulin shelters along a pavement, in a park or adjacent to a railway line. Children are often referred to as *potho-shishu* (street children), and far less frequently adults referred to as *rasta lok* (road men) or *rasta manush* (road people), while at the same time living in a *bosti*.

In everyday discourse it is common for people associated with these spaces, to be defined through reference to particular occupations. For example they may be referred to as *tokai*<sup>103</sup> (ragpicker or scavenger) or as *bikkuk* (beggar). These labels are often applied in a generalised manner, as if all people living in such spaces do such work. These low-end occupations are inherently associated with open public spaces, and the significance of this is not difficult to appreciate. These spaces are where rubbish is casually thrown, where dogs live, where men urinate, and where the drains and sewage systems overflow. There is no (or very little) privacy and hence people cannot maintain norms regarding *purdah*<sup>104</sup>, and there is therefore a perceived lack of respectability. The association between *moyla* (dirt) and occupation is deep-rooted, related to a long history of low caste Hindus and Muslims servicing waste and more broadly defiled services as discussed in chapter three. The association with low status occupations is also an indication that these people are materially poor, and the expression *tader kichu nai* (they have nothing) is often expressed.

The association between people and these open and public spaces is widely understood in Bangladesh as an indication of a detachment from society. This is contained in a range of labels that portray these people as floating, or drifting, cut off from their homes. More educated people often use the term *bashoman* to refer to people living in these circumstances. This term comes from the word *basho* meaning floating, and therefore translates as ‘floating person’. This term is central to the Government of

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<sup>102</sup> In the case of the Panto Kunjo pavement, many people refer to it as having become a *bosti*. What specifically qualifies it in people’s minds differs. Some mention the fact that it has become so dirty, with the *tokai* collecting their goods to be recycled on a weekly basis, leaving them in the gutter piled up in bags, or the fact that their waste spreads into the park creating a dirty environment. Others indicate that is the permanence of such people’s presence there that qualifies it as a *bosti*. The fact that some people have been there for almost twenty years, and the fact that they are so ingrained in the environment and local economy, that even when they are evicted, they simply return later that day or a few days later. Indeed the association between a *bosti* and the materials with which the shelter is made (tin, for example) may be less about the materials, and more about what they symbolise – a permanence, some weak form of right to reside in that place. A final characteristic is simply the quantity of people living there. Whereas twenty years or so ago it was identified as only having fifteen or so families, there are now over two hundred people, such that they are spread all along the footpath.

<sup>103</sup> Note that while *tokai* is widely used it is sometimes disliked and considered insulting by children and adults who are scavengers. They prefer specifying that they scavenge paper (*kagos tokai*), or bottles (*bottle tokai*) etc.

<sup>104</sup> The practice, common in South Asia, of social separation between women and men from outside the household.

Bangladesh's categorisation of urban poverty, which is contrasted against the term *bosti-bashi* (slum dweller)<sup>105</sup>. This image also comes from the practices of religious-cultural groups common in Bangladesh, particularly Sufi Muslim aesthetics referred to sometimes as *fakir*, as well as the *Baul*, who traditionally move around the country, sometimes playing music, reciting stories or poetry and can be found particularly at *mazar*. The term *zazabag* – meaning vagabond or gypsy - may be used to indicate drifting or wandering, moving from area to area. Similarly, the term *tokai* stems from a verb meaning 'to look for', and the image of *tokai* – particularly children and women - searching the city with bags collecting recyclable goods, or of the beggars at junctions moving from car to car, symbolise this disconnect. This idea of floating can even be expressed at the street level. I once heard the groups of young *tokai* who move around the university area referred to as the *rohingha group*<sup>106</sup> by someone who stays outside the Supreme Court, though they were not ethnically rohingha.

Underlying this notion of wandering or drifting are perceptions about people's relational condition, and deeply intertwined with this, their moral status. In the case of children and the elderly there is a common refrain that they "have no-one" (*keu nai*), and more generally they "have no home" (*bari nai*). Underlying this is their identification with being "rootless". This is captured by the term *chinomul*. *Chino* indicates torn or separated while *mul* indicates root, and the term therefore means "up rooted" or "rootless". The term was once used as the name of an NGO centre for children in Dhaka, and the notion of being "rootless" is also used in India (Patel 1990: 10). The key narrative is thus that people's roots in their *bari* have been broken and hence they live a life at the urban margins. A dominant perception within society and institutionalised within government discourse is then of a drifting class, disconnected from a key social-moral base underpinning society. These are exemplified into this description from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2014: 3) '[the] floating population constitutes the mobile and vagrant category of rootless people', or as a popular English language newspaper described the community I researched with at Pantho Kunjo: *the rootless people are flooding in the capital to eke out an existence... a floating family struggles to accommodate to its makeshift stay...* (Dhaka Tribune 2013).

Alongside these narratives however interestingly sits a sense that many are happy with this way of life. One person expressed it to me like this:

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<sup>105</sup> Elsewhere the government use the language of 'vagrants' and 'shelterless people', as in the 2011 'Vagrants and Shelterless People's Act' (BRAC et al. 2011). Note that the potho-bosti discussed previously are categorised under the bosti-bashi.

<sup>106</sup> The rohingha in North West Myanmar are seen as being without a home, moving from place to place, and many are refugees in Bangladesh.

*You know these people are actually doing well? I will tell you why. They have no tension. One day they sleep here, another day there. They don't worry about the past or the future, or about what they will eat tomorrow*<sup>107</sup>

People are perceived as having chosen this way of life, as enjoying the freedom to go where they want, to take drugs and have “free sex”, as it is often expressed. The common sight of children being mischievous and playing on the streets for example, seems to represent their freedom from the constraints of society<sup>108</sup>. An undertone to this characterisation is the sense that people do not have the discipline to live in the correct way. People would describe the freedom to take drugs, have sex and generally behave in ways that would be more constrained in a family or community context in large *bosti* or villages. Taken together the labels commonly associated with these people and spaces portray a dirty and defiled space, inhabited by people who are materially destitute, who lack respectability and social value, are disconnected from mainstream society, who float between spaces, and are torn from their roots in an ancestral home. The distinction between people living in slums or on the streets has been argued to be problematic, and as will be demonstrated through the course of the following chapters many of the assumptions underlying labels such as *bashoman* or *chinomul* do not accurately portray the dominant dynamics to these people's livelihoods.

For the sake of simplicity however a label of some sort has to be adopted. The only term I have encountered that the people described use to refer to themselves is *kangali*, and this is also the case for Bengalis living in similar circumstances in Kolkata<sup>109</sup>. *Kangali* means an extreme form of poverty, akin to destitution, and stems from the word *kangal*, meaning to be in need of. As well as ‘destitute’, the word could also therefore be translated into English as ‘the needy’. The term can be used pejoratively, and when used to identify others, can have negative and offensive connotations. Conticini (2005: 72) described how some children in his research site took offence at the term, as it can imply ‘the condition of being deprived’. At the same time however, my experience of the term suggests that it is often drawn upon as a way of denoting a unity, a shared condition, a status that people have taken on (and can be used even by those with comparatively better off economic positions<sup>110</sup>). *Kangali* is often used to

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<sup>107</sup> Similar opinions were expressed about prostitutes in Dhaka in the early 20th century. Allen (1912: 60) wrote ‘it is doubtful whether prostitutes as a whole are really discontented with their lot. The life of an orthodox and respectable Indian woman is hedged round by innumerable restrictions which must be exceedingly irksome to the more adventurous spirits among them, and there seem grounds for supposing that those who have once been placed outside the pale enjoy the wider interests and greater variety of their lives. They at any rate show little inclination to abandon it. Drink and disease are, however, unfortunately prevalent among them’.

<sup>108</sup> Indeed, a famous Bangladeshi artist, Rafiqun Nabi, imagines the tokai as astute critics of mainstream society in his newspaper caricatures.

<sup>109</sup> I specify Bengalis, because many people living in these contexts in Kolkata are from Bihar, and I am unsure about the terminology they use.

<sup>110</sup> People may on one occasion identify themselves and their immediate others as *kangali*, but in another instance define themselves against the *kangali*, or point to others as *kangali*. *Look at us all here, we are sitting here, sleeping at the bazar, we are kangali!* I remember being told by Salam, a labourer

indicate a helplessness; and in the context of eviction drives by the police and city corporation officials for example, I often heard: *we are kangali, where can we go?! It can also be evocative and poetic (a famous Bangladeshi singer is called Kangalini Sufia) and therefore has complex meanings. The term kangali captures an almost visceral quality to life in these contexts and is chosen in this thesis as the most authentic way of referring to these people. Its use in this thesis is not however intended to homogenise the lives and experiences of the people it refers to. I was reminded of the importance of recognising heterogeneity by Masud who I met around the Supreme Court, a middle aged man who scavenges and sleeps at the nearby Kakrail mosque. He told me:*

*People aren't all the same. Some are heroin addicts, some take other drugs, some inject, some steal, some are hawkers, some scavenge paper, some scavenge bottles, some work, some eat kichuri, some look for blankets, some just spend the whole day eating charity, some don't wash, some don't pray. There are different types of people!*

In summary, it is then acknowledged that the term *kangali* is contentious, that it is not a neat analytical category, but is adopted here as the most authentic way of referring to these people, and is used in the spirit of the sentiment above.

#### 5.2.2. URBAN RESEARCH AND THE KANGALI

Existing research on the *kangali* from Bangladesh is primarily quantitative in nature, and commonly uses the notion of a 'street dweller' to refer to adults and 'street children' to refer to children (Begum 1999; Conticini 2005; Conticini and Hulme 2007; Koehlmoos et al 2009; Patwary et al. 2012; Atkinson-Sheppard 2015; BRAC 2016). Begum (1997: 37) identified 'street dwellers' as the people who 'spend their nights in public shelters like railway platforms, bus terminuses, launch *ghats*, shopping arcades, staircases of commercial buildings, footpaths or any other available sleeping space'. The topics focused on by these studies include health (Koehlmoos et al. 2009), migration (Begum 1999), migration and livelihoods in relation to street children (Conticini and Hulme 2007), and the condition of youth scavengers (Patwary et al. 2011). Collectively this work challenges some of the characterisations portrayed in the sub-section above. Conticini's work from the early 2000s with street children represents the only significant qualitative study in this field, and was based on ethnographic methods. One key argument emerging from this is that social factors related to household instability and violence are far more important than material poverty for understanding child migration. Conticini has also pointed to the dynamic nature of the livelihoods of street children, with more complex and higher set of assets and incomes than often perceived (Conticini 2005). The significance of violence is further developed by Patwary et al (2011) who interviewed young men (aged 20-25) engaged in medical scavenging about their experiences and the processes by which

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at Karwan Bazar. Later on Salam identified those people involved in extreme forms of political violence as the *rasta-kangali-oshohi* (road-destitute-helpless), pointing over to the main road.

they came into scavenging. These authors found that a minority of respondents suffered serious caste discrimination; while many others had suffered sexual abuse and insecure family situations. The authors highlight problems of drug addiction (also highlighted by Koehlmoos et al. 2009) and the importance of social networks for survival, though do not examine their dynamics in any detail.

Three surveys of 'street dweller's in Dhaka have collected detailed quantitative data (Begum 1997; Koehlmoos et al. 2009; BRAC 2011). Begum (1997) used a stratified proportionate random sampling procedure with 2761 individuals, focusing on migration and a small number of livelihood characteristics. Koehlmoos et al. (2009) used a purposive sampling method with 896 individuals (50 per cent men/women) and focuses primarily on health. Finally BRAC (2011) used a snowball sampling method with 2264 individuals and focused more generally on livelihoods. These studies differ significantly not only in the methods used, but also the specific questions and criteria used. This makes comparative analysis difficult; however a brief summary of what these studies found can be offered. It appears that women living in these circumstances experience more acute forms of poverty and vulnerability than men. BRAC (2011: 45) found that that 45 per cent of 'street dwellers' in Dhaka are women, and this is significantly higher than the 22.4 per cent found by Begum (1997), based on data from 1991. This finding is particularly significant when contrasted regionally: in Delhi for example only 15 per cent are women (UNDP 2010: 35). BRAC found that almost 60 per cent of women living in these conditions were unmarried, widowed, divorced or abandoned (though Koehlmoos et al (2009) found that only 39 per cent of women had these characteristics). Furthermore, BRAC found that the proportion of men who had lived on the streets for over 10 years was 17.9 per cent, while for women this was 30.1 per cent. There is also some data that indicates women suffer significantly more physical abuse than men. For Koehlmoos et al (2009) 83 per cent of women reported having been assaulted while living on the street, and for men this figure was 29 per cent.

Together, this data could suggest that there is a concentration of women who are abandoned and who may also be associated with the streets for a longer period. Alongside this however, as noted in the previous section, Koehlmoos et al (2009) also found that when asked why they lived on the 'street' (including transport terminals, parks etc.) 33 per cent of women answered that they were comfortable staying in a street dweller 'cluster', while 34 per cent reported that it was because others from their area of origin lived there. The sense of people living with others from their home district, and of people having lived in such spaces for long periods<sup>111</sup>, radically challenge the idea that people are "floating", but rather suggests that people are embedded in particular spaces. Furthermore, though physically separate from their home village, for some people at least there is still a connection to their *bari* through the communities in which they live in Dhaka. Qualitative work from Conticini (2005)

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<sup>111</sup> BRAC's (2011) survey found that 16.6% of men, and 23.3% of women had lived in their location for between 5-10 years, while 17.9% of men and 30.1% of women had lived there for over 10 years.

Conticini and Hulme (2007) and also Ghafur (2001), which fed into cross country work by Tipple and Speak (2006), suggests that the relationships that these people maintain with rural homes can be far greater than the language of being torn from ones roots implies. These findings resonate with the descriptions from the first half of this chapter.

The picture being built from existing studies on the *kangali* in Dhaka is therefore one that already questions popular perceptions about these people, and suggests nuances and complexities to their livelihoods. While this literature is of background relevance, it does not offer significant insight into the core areas of interest within this thesis. Two pieces of research published during the course of this thesis are of far greater relevance (Atkinson-Sheppard 2015; BRAC 2016). Both of these studies examine the political economy of street children in Dhaka, offering account from children of how they are involved in political violence and crime. BRAC (2016) describe how political leaders and activists termed *boro bhai* (big brother) involve children in political violence, forcing them or incentivising them through money or drugs, to fulfil tasks such as carrying bombs or throwing molotov cocktails. Strikingly, of the 69 children involved in the BRAC study, 10 children had been approached for such activities in the three months preceding the research. Atkinson-Sheppard (2015) substantiates this, but also suggests wider roles that such street children are involved in, including land-grabbing in slums, collecting extortion money, selling drugs and contract killing. Though focused solely on children, these studies suggest the *kangali* have a close connection to a social order premised on dispersed capability for violence, and characterised in Bangladesh by party political competition.

### 5.3. CONCLUSION

This chapter has introduced the people and places at the centre of this thesis. While studies on the ‘urban poor’ in Bangladesh often focus on well-established and partially serviced *bosti*, this thesis examines the lives of people living in the open or in the most basic *bosti*. These people are subject to strong characterisations in public discourse, and are perceived as *floating* and *rootless*, disconnected from wider society. Internationally they are labelled ‘squatters’ or ‘street dwellers’, however the Bengali term *kangali* is adopted here as the most authentic term used in the contexts described. These people typically work as labourers, scavengers, beggars, and a small number are sex workers. A group particularly focused upon in subsequent chapters are called *jupri*, a group of market labourers who have grown up at Karwan Bazar, where they continue to live and work. Using the theoretical framework developed in chapter two, and examined through literature and historical sources from Bangladesh in chapter three, the following chapters examine the dynamics of intermediation and social order through the microcosm of people living in Karwan Bazar, on some pavements and in a park.

## 6. THE CHANGING FACE OF URBAN ORDER

*Karwan Bazar used to run under the godfather but now everything runs under  
politics*

Rubel, *jupri* group *boro bhai*

While the *kangali* may be portrayed as disconnected from Bangladeshi society, as rootless or wandering, this thesis argues that they are in fact closely integrated into the social order. This and subsequent chapters argue that the *kangali* often depend on a complex web of powerful actors to access the resources that they need to pursue their livelihoods and interests. These relationships contribute to maintaining the capability for violence of the lowest levels of the ruling coalition and thereby are part of the dynamics by which social order is maintained. Unlike in large *bosti*, access to space for living is not in general mediated financially. Furthermore, the majority of *kangali* do not depend on centralised services such as water, gas or electricity. Where the *kangali* are closely dependent on other actors for resources is in terms of personal security, employment and the right to do business. Day to day life is therefore often premised on maintaining, building and negotiating these relationships.

Descriptions of the need for such dependencies are common, and expressed in diverse ways. Marium, who used to live on *Panto Kunjo* pavement, the *bosti* as she described it, but now works as a cleaner at an NGO shelter where she also stays, described the situation to me:

*If you are living on the streets who will give you work? You have no address, you have no identity [porichoy nai], you are homeless [basto-hara]. You can work, but who will provide you work? Let's talk about me, if I'm starving for two days, I didn't eat anything, where will I go? If someone gave me work, I would go, but who will give it to me? You have to be very self-driven to go to find your own work, because you are hungry. I can say to someone, I will wash your pots, you can give me 5 taka and I will eat rice, but only if I am known to them, if I'm not known, then how will I ask?*

Marium's sister Monwara, who still lives by the side of Pantho Kunjo pavement, expressed another need - *there's no "security" here on the streets. We don't have guards like in the buildings.* Naseema, a middle aged woman who interestingly described herself as a *kangali*, but is also an Awami League Hawkers leader near Osmani Uddyan park, told me that *if you want to live on the streets you have to have someone... He might be a boyfriend or a husband, it doesn't matter.* The relationships identified and the vocabulary through which people express these needs differ. More abstractly, it may be spoken of as having "*backing*" from senior people, or being *under* someone. To find work you might need a "*reference*". However more directly it may be described as *having someone*, having a *boro bhai* (big brother), having an "*uncle*",

having a relationship with a *leader*. Aziz, an NGO field worker with boys at Karwan Bazar, described the situation like this:

*You need to keep a good relationship with the boro bhai to keep safe or to get work. If you don't, then you can't sleep on the streets, you might be tortured. But then the boro bhai themselves might also torture you or steal your money*

The purpose of this chapter is to understand key forms of intermediation common in the lives of the *kangali*. Findings provide evidence for the theorised relationship between intermediation, the 'ruling coalition' and the capability for violence. This enables subsequent chapters to delve deeper into the forms of intermediation that the *kangali* depend upon, and examine how the *kangali* negotiate their lives and status' within this order.

Across the research sites a relatively consistent picture was built of key actors to whom the *kangali* looked to maintain access to the resources they need to pursue their livelihoods and interests. The actors identified however challenge common understandings of intermediation in urban Bangladesh. Chapter three explored how *mastan* gangs have been identified as prevalent and powerful intermediaries in the lives of the urban poor. Using the case study of an infamous gangster at Karwan Bazar, as well as supporting evidence from secondary locations in Dhaka, the first half of this chapter argues that *mastan* gangs have declined significantly since the early 2000s. Many of the roles associated with these actors however continue, but now under an explicitly party political guise, controlled by wings and associated bodies of the ruling Awami League. This argument suggests that the capability for violence is now more greatly concentrated and institutionalised within political parties, a process that has in fact led to a significant decrease in physical violence in the lives of the *kangali*.

The second half of this chapter argues that today the *kangali* relate to a complex web of intermediaries dominated by the ruling Awami League and the police. These actors are closely associated with the capability for violence, and can be seen as constituting the lowest level rungs of the 'ruling coalition' as conceptualised in chapter two<sup>112</sup>. The *kangali* are obliged to adhere to the interests of these actors, and this is enforced through the threat and use of violence. At the same time, the *kangali* are a valuable source of labour for political purposes, as well as money through *chanda* (toll, extortion). Labour leaders are a critical intermediary in the lives of the *kangali* who often position those working underneath them in relation to party politics and the ruling coalition. Examining this web of actors and the terms of these relationships helps frame an examination of labour leaders in the next chapter.

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<sup>112</sup> It should be noted that establishing how these actors relate to one another as well as this wider coalition is beyond the remit of this thesis, however that they do so, can be taken as given from what we know about Bangladeshi politics, as well as the perceptions of the *kangali*.



## 6.1. THE DECLINE OF MASTAN GANGS

Prior to conducting research at Karwan Bazar I had been warned by former colleagues and friends that it was a violent, dangerous place, certainly not somewhere to go at night. After a couple of months of researching there I however began reflecting on people's warnings. Aside from the odd fight and jostling for work, I had seen little evidence of significant violence, and started to suspect I had been duped by some upper class hysteria. And so I asked people, such as the labourers in the *jupri* group, what the bazar used to be like. Responses were clear and theatrical. *You wouldn't have been able to come here back then*, many people told me. *You would have been robbed as soon as you arrived, this nice phone, gone, your "money bag", gone*, a member of the group Nazir explained. Words were often accompanied by gestures. *Bang bang bang* pistols firing, the whistle of bombs being thrown overhead, the guttural noise of a knife meeting flesh.

Through these conversations I learnt that from roughly the late 1980s until the early 2000s gangsters had dominated Dhaka. These are referenced through terms such as *mastan*, the *shontrash*, the "*top terror*", the *godfather*, who were portrayed in films, infamous throughout the country, evoking fear and glamour, reminiscent of the mafia in the West. Names rung out and became almost mythologised by the public. But across Dhaka today if you ask people about these figures, about how or where they operate, you will most likely hear one of the following, all of which I was often told: *the mastan are from the past, they have no importance now; they have been killed; they have fled to India; they are in prison; they have become beggars*. Within Dhaka, Karwan Bazar is perceived by many as having been the nerve centre of these gangsters, and within Karwan Bazar one name stood above the rest: *Picchi Hannan*<sup>113</sup>. It is through understanding the rise and fall of this famous gangster that the main arguments of this section will be told.

### 6.1.1. PICCHI HANNAN AND THE ERA OF MASTAN

*Picchi Hannan* was from a village in Chandpur district, to the south east of Dhaka<sup>114</sup>. He came to the city after failing class seven at school when he must have been in his early teens, and joined his father and brothers who were already established and working at Karwan Bazar. As one informant described it, he first *lived on the road at Karwan Bazar, at that time everyone lived on the road!* Through the 1970s and 80s the city saw a mass influx of migrants, often settling wherever they could, on pavements, banks of canals or adjacent to the railway line. Hannan found work in the nearby Central Storage Depots (CSD) *godown*, a government warehouse just northeast

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<sup>113</sup> *Picchi* is a colloquial way of saying 'short' and can be used to refer to young children.

<sup>114</sup> Descriptions here are made firstly on the basis of interviews and discussions with people who knew *Picchi Hannan* personally at Karwan Bazar. This includes someone who described himself as having been his *karam board* and *gambling partner* in youth, as well as established business owners, labourers, and former members of his gang. Secondly, analysis is based on a number of secondary sources, pieced together primarily from references in the media. Undoubtedly with a figure of his stature, myth often overtakes reality. Furthermore this account should only be considered a sketch, partial and incomplete, and as therefore a call to further research.

of the bazar. There he worked as a *coolie* for a couple of years, though left apparently because the work was too irregular. His father was a rice seller, a retailer rather than a wholesaler, who sold on the roadside at the bazar. Retailers open primarily during the day and wholesalers at night, so *Picchi Hannan* used to hang his mosquito net up next to the bags of rice and sleep there, guarding his father's small business. Other sources inaccurately cite his roots as a *tokai*, but truthfully point to his humble past. He was then very much like the labourers you find today, a poor young man sleeping at the market.

By the mid 80s Hannan had got married, apparently a "*love marriage*"<sup>115</sup>, and began working as a security guard for a daily wage. He also became known as a good fighter, *he was a good "cadre", he had the guts to fight (ghushi tushi shahoj)*, a friend in his youth explained. When called to fight in the area he would go. Around this time the nature of urban power was changing in ways that set the stage for Hannan's rise through the 1990s and early 2000s. As discussed in chapter three, under President Ershad the capability for violence of a wider set of actors were drawn upon in order to retain control over society (Khan 2010a). At Karwan Bazar this was seen with new levels of political organisation at the street level, new makeshift political clubs, no more than tin shacks emerged (as many are today), where people met, discussed politics, had *adda* (gossip), and where food and relief were also distributed. More specifically, one informant described President Ershad attempting to galvanise support for his *Jatiyo Party* in the run up to the 1986 election by doubling worker's wages if they joined his party<sup>116</sup>. Descriptions of life at the bazar at this time indicate a new degree of political involvements by the urban poor, and in particular labourers.

At the same time, it is at this period that informants identified gangs as taking on a greater significance at the lowest levels of urban life<sup>117</sup>. Though there is evidence of the presence of *goonda* in Dhaka's history is undoubted, the scale of *mastani* during the 1990s suggests a new level of organisation. Across Dhaka *mastan* gangs controlled territory under clear leaders. To varying degrees they were sheltered politically, and grew within political regimes, yet were also opportunistic and could switch allegiances (Devine 2007). It is the leaders and members of these gangs that are commonly referred to through terms such as *shontrash*, *mastan* or *godfather*. *Picchi Hannan* came under the shelter of the *Jatiyo* party, and during Ershad's rule he went from being *a good person, a labourer (mojur), a poor man*, as an informant described him, to fighting his way to be a "*chief*" of a "*unit*", ruling a "*side*" or "*portion*" of Karwan Bazar. But at this stage he was still only a low level player in a sea of *mastan*. As has also been documented elsewhere (Ahmed 2004), *Picchi Hannan* rose up the ranks through his relationship with *Sweden Aslam* who was the top *shontrash* in the area. Some say they met in prison in the mid 90s, and he capitalised on Aslam's re-arrest in

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<sup>115</sup> The term "*love marriage*" is often used in Bengali to refer to when a couple have married after falling in love as opposed to the marriage being arranged by family.

<sup>116</sup> I have been unfortunately unable to verify this, and it should be the subject of further research.

<sup>117</sup> While there are some brief references to the emergence of the *mastan* in the late 1980s, there is no detail, and this should be the subject of future research.

1997, effectively taking over control from him. What is clear is that by the late 1990s he had emerged as the premier *godfather* in the area. His territory was seen by some as focusing around the bazar, while people from the area see him as having been the premier *mastan* across the city. Abul, a labourer who grew up at the bazar, described him to me as having been the *king of Dhaka*<sup>118</sup>.

Having risen to power *Picchi Hannan* was simultaneously connected to politics and government, while also being a wanted man. He used to have to move from shelter to shelter to avoid capture by the police, and people recall seeing him surrounded by his bodyguards, describing him as small, hence his name *picchi*, and fat because he never did manual work. He had a reputation for spending his time doing drugs and with women. Though wanted, he was also sheltered politically, as one informant who was a friend of his during their youth described

*When Jatiyo Party was in power, he was doing Jatiyo party. When BNP were in power, he did BNP. When Dr. Ali<sup>119</sup> came to power he started working for him. He worked for whichever party was in power.*

Part of these relationships involved sending labour to political rallies and meetings, though the dynamics of these connections were undoubtedly more complicated. Despite these affiliations he is not perceived by people who were within his gang and knew him personally, as having had an explicitly party political identity, and the quote above suggests a high degree of independence. In fact, some of the lower level wings of the political parties were his rivals. Recognising this is central to understanding the subsequent shifts in power explored in the next section. The same informant describes events following the 1996 general election victory for the Awami League

*A lot of members of Jubo League at Karwan Bazar were killed. At that time they were powerful. So he killed most of them. Jubo League's Ward Secretary Khaleque, killed. Jubo League's President Hanif, killed. Jubo League's next secretary Delu, killed. Jubo Dal members were also killed. He killed Jubo Dal's secretary, but he killed more of the League than the Dal. He would kill whoever wanted to do extortion using political power. He wanted to do the extortion on his own.*

Despite being politically affiliated *Picchi Hannan* and similar figures are not perceived by those who knew them as principally having had power on the basis of their status within political institutions or party political connections, but rather on the basis of the gang they could mobilise beneath them. At his height Hannan is described by many as having controlled a network of over 2000 people structured hierarchically

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<sup>118</sup> This is not to suggest that he was, but emphasises how powerful he was perceived to be, particularly by the labourers at Karwan Bazar.

<sup>119</sup> The name here is anonymised but refers to a former local Awami League MP and a current high profile businessman.

with clearly delineated roles<sup>120</sup>. He reportedly had five bodyguards. Each bodyguard was himself in charge of a hundred or hundreds of men. Among the rank and file members of the gang, some were armed, others were informers, and some were in the *reserve force*, ready to be called when needed. Some were drug dealers on the rail line mentioned in the previous chapter, selling mostly phensedyl, the drug of choice across the north of the sub-continent at the time. Nazir, now a labourer in the *jupri* group, used to be one of twenty phensedyl sellers under Hannan. He grew up at Karwan Bazar after running away from a madrassa as a child. He explained his involvement to me:

*I used to sell phensoldyl on the rail line, there used to be a spot for drugs there. All the robbers and thieves used to come to the point to buy from us. I used to work under him [Picchi Hannan] so it wasn't risky for him but just for me. When I worked under him I did all sorts of work like stealing, hijacking, beating people, even shooting people and throwing bombs. In the morning there used to be bombings and shootings, you might even see dead bodies when he was here... Then I was put in prison for three years.*

Labourers would describe Nazir and others as having been a *rongbaj* (gangster). For leaders like *Picchi Hannan* the *kangali* represented a labour force, and for the *kangali*, the *mastan* networks were a job market. Young *kangali* boys often live without their parents, without their families, on the basis of relationships and networks they have developed since coming to Dhaka. Children living without families were attracted to the offer of money, hope of glamour and respect. Even today you see how young boys and teenagers adopt styles associated with the *godfather* and *mastan*: chains, bracelets, rings, partly cropped haircuts (though this is also inspired by the popular footballer Neymar). Working under a *mastan* – being a *rongbaj* (gangster), be it collecting *chanda*, being an informer, a lookout, a shooter, a drug dealer - represented a significant opportunity. All offered a route to a better more glamorous life. Rashid, an NGO field worker who worked with street children at Karwan Bazar for a number of years, told me how *lots of big mastan have come through the centres*. This connection has also been recognised in Kolkata; writing of the colonial period Ghosh (1991: 5-6) notes how ‘rootless’ people (*chinomul*) living on the side of the road joined the *goonda* underworld.

Gangs of the size of Hannan’s were organised factionally, and his gang therefore consisted of a number of smaller groups. Labourers described to me how Karwan Bazar itself was divided between separate *choto* (small) *godfather*, each controlling particular areas and businesses in the bazar. These were described as correlating broadly to the way in which the bazar is now divided between areas of labour and

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<sup>120</sup> There is an interesting parallel to criminals from an earlier era, which also demonstrates the long-standing links between the ruling coalition and organised crime. Referring to the 18th century Taylor (1840: 276) wrote of the gangs of armed dacoits who roamed East Bengal, robbing and murdering – ‘they formed organized bands, frequently amounting to 1,500 men in number, and headed by daring leaders, generally under the protection of some powerful Zemindar who shared the plunder with them’.

supply of goods. Groups of labourers were integrated into these gangs and in fact many of the earliest *mastan* were labour leaders<sup>121</sup>, as a long-term resident of the bazar described

*The first big mastan in Karwan Bazar was a butcher called Piare Mahzan, of Koshipotti [butchers place], he united all the butchers... Then there was the truck drivers. Hundreds of truck drivers united with their helpers and started doing mastani... There was Kancham, a coolie sardar, he was a big mastan, he was Picchi Hannan opposition [potipoko].*

Hannan became extraordinary wealthy through creating monopolies at the market, dealing in drugs, prostitution and arms, kidnapping and extortion, protection racketeering, and taking slices of government contracts<sup>122</sup>. But rather than taking money from the poor, he was seen as taking money from the rich. The moral ambiguity of *mastan* described previously is also evident here. He was for example described as a terrible person, but also as having had a lot of affection (*dorot*) for poor people, building hospitals and mosques. Despite this, *everyone was scared of his name* as a *jupri* labourer Abul described<sup>123</sup>. At Karwan Bazar he operated a vast network of toll collecting/protection racketeering (*chanda*) from businesses in the area, and Ahmed (2004: 104) cites his income from this source alone as being over one million *taka* a month, though if anything this seems a conservative estimate. Locals explained how the vegetable wholesalers would be regularly kidnapped. Hannan would send 15 to 20 of his men to capture someone, take them to a private place and start torturing them. They would have to pay 50,000 even 1 or 2 *lakh*<sup>124</sup> *taka* to be set free. Similarly, if someone was constructing a building they would have to give 5, 10, 15 *lakh* to his group or the workers would be beaten and construction forced to shut. One role of the informers was to monitor who was doing well, and who would be targeted next. At Karwan Bazar he also enforced monopolies on certain goods to maximise his income, as a childhood friend of his described:

*When Picchi Hannan was in power, only two businessmen could sell Indian tomatoes here, and no-one else. If someone else tried to sell them, Picchi Hannan's people would kidnap them... When tomatoes were imported from India for 40 taka per KG they would be sold for 55 taka per KG, making 15 taka profit. If everyone could sell them, they would sell for 42 taka per KG, because 2 taka profit would be enough. But people weren't allowed to. Only Picchi Hannan's people could sell tomatoes. That "murgi milon"<sup>125</sup> made*

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<sup>121</sup> This therefore nuances Khan's (2000) portrayal of sardar as underneath *mastan*, demonstrating how these forms of organization intertwined, in line descriptions from Kolkata of how *sardar* could become *goonda*.

<sup>122</sup> He apparently constructed Babul Tower, which he named after a friend, and stands today to the north of the bazar.

<sup>123</sup> There are echoes here of a 'social bandit' (Hobsbawm 1959).

<sup>124</sup> A *lakh* is one hundred thousand.

<sup>125</sup> *Murgi milon* (chicken milon) was a famous *mastan* of the time, killed in 2000 by a rival, reportedly *tokai sagar* (scavenger sagar) of another gangster *kala jahangir*'s group (black Jahangir).

*crores of taka by selling tomatoes. They gave a portion of the profit to Picchi Hannan. When chicken was 80 taka a KG, only Picchi Hannan's people would sell them. This is how they controlled business.*

This period of Dhaka's history is associated with extreme forms of day-to-day violence and insecurity, as has been evidenced in some of the descriptions above, and was clear from research across the city, not only at Karwan Bazar. Rubel, who we have heard of already, explained how ordinary people could just be standing around chatting and then a bomb would hit them, one losing a leg, another a hand. The clearest source of violence was inter-gang rivalry. Nazir explained why this was the case

*Before there were lots of groupings, I used to work for one big brother, you used to work for another, so if you kill one big brother then you will get contract money from the boss, and your boss will be able to take over that group.*

Throughout Dhaka areas were associated with the name of a *mastan* group, often prefixed with a defining characteristic – for example *black, small, scavenger, destitute, chicken, Bihari, Sweden, BBC* - as also seen from the references so far. Across Dhaka people recall the names of the previous *mastan* who were dominant in that area. Near Osmani Uddyan park I came across the name *Kangali Zakir* (destitute Zakir), who a journalist described as being little more than a *choto mastan*! He was a “snatcher”, a “hijacker”. He had 5 or 7 people under him. He killed a Sergeant/sub-inspector who tried to capture him, and then he became famous. Though famous beyond his station, he maintained a “group” or a *dal*, as it was described by women who knew him personally. With his group he used to collect *chanda* locally and hijack people in wealthy areas, *cutting their throats*, as one of the women described it. Despite being a *mastan* his behaviour was good, and local people used to call him “uncle”, and *boro bhai*. Though he (at least was perceived) to earn one *lakh* a day through theft and *chanda*, he had a group to maintain, used to drink and gamble. Naseema, who lived near him, explained

*He lived beside the “dustbin”. He moved up slowly slowly slowly. His mother was a beggar and one of his sisters is blind and still begs. Another of his sister's sells chocolate.*

In the case of *Picchi Hannan* it was the threat of rivals at a higher level than the likes of *kangali Zakir* that were the primary source of violence, as his childhood friend described:

*There was the Ali group, Saidul group, Roton Asiq group, Selim group... this side Sweden Aslam, this side Picchi Hannan, that side Prokash-Bikash group in Mirpur, Asif in Puran Dhaka, Imon group in Dhanmondi, another group in Mohakali... There was a competition to show off who was the most powerful. If they weren't pushed back, they would take control.*

A further reason for high levels of violence was factional conflict within Hannan's group. As the same informant described it, *under him there were lots of people who wanted to be Picchi Hannan*. Mohammed, a labourer in the *jupri* group, described the situation in the late 90s and early 2000s

*There used to be lots of fighting between the jupri and other groups. We used to be on two sides running against each and fighting. The trucks used to be left at the side not even unloaded! We would fight, then sleep, then the whistle would come and we would run and fight again*

When describing the situation, Parvez, a leader of the group, said *the situation used to be bad, we fought because of "mafia"*. The history of this period is one people often do not want to talk about it, they do not like to think about. Some people get angry when they are reminded of what they used to do and who they used to be. Some of the children and young adults working at the bazar today are the relatives, sons or daughters, of the *mastan* of this previous generation. Monir, a young labourer at the bazar who stays at the Aparajeyo centre and often styles his hair into a mohawk emulating Neymar, was the son of Babul, a locally famous *mastan* under *Picchi Hannan*. A younger rickshaw van driver Sayeed described him: *As Karwan Bazar people were scared of the name Hannan, like this they were also scared of the name Babul, because he used to capture people and beat them. And sometimes kill them*.

Despite his power, wealth and fame, a few years later in the early 2000s *Picchi Hannan* was in the custody of Bangladesh's elite force the newly formed Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and later allegedly executed by them. Understanding this and the subsequent transition in power is critical for understanding the nature of the ruling coalition and social order in Dhaka today.

#### 6.1.2. RAB AND THE FURTHER RISE OF PARTY POLITICS

*The days of there being these big brothers are finished, many have died, many are drug addicts, many are beggars and many just steal from beggars.*

Naseema, a low-level Hawkers League leader

In 2001 the BNP returned to power with a public commitment to bring an end to the high levels of violence and crime seen in Dhaka and throughout Bangladesh. Powerful urban gangs that were identified as central to this, and the government offered rewards for information leading to the capture of "23 top terror", including *Picchi Hannan*. In late 2002 this mission got a name, 'Operation Clean Heart' and was driven by the mass deployment of the military. As a result, many top *mastan* fled to India, often sheltering in Kolkata, as was the case for Hannan who even earned a reference in the BBC (2002). Despite around 10,000 people being arrested, crime and violence continued, the *mastan* resumed their business (Human Rights Watch 2006), and the mission appeared to have failed. This effort was however given a major boost with the formation of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) in 2004. RAB is an elite force formed from the police

and army, designed to fight terrorism and high-level crime. Often called a “death squad” in international media, they initially received training from the British, and became infamous internationally for extrajudicial killings, euphemistically termed *crossfire* in Bangla (The Guardian 2010a; 2010b)<sup>126</sup>. When people at Karwan Bazar and Dhaka in general respond that *the mastan have been killed*, it is usually followed by *RAB killed them*.

Having returned to Bangladesh after years spent in hiding, *Picchi Hannan* was almost apprehended on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2004. Bangladesh’s *The Daily Star* reported that RAB had attempted to arrest Hannan and some members of his gang in Uttara, north Dhaka. The account describes the ‘notorious’ Hannan and his gang shooting their way through a ‘40-member strong Rab team’ before getting away in a car under gunfire and with one tyre burst (The Daily Star 2004a). Such events have since fed public imagination, strengthening him as a heroic figure, someone who was able to take RAB on. It appears from reports that he was however arrested the next day while receiving treatment for bullet wounds in Savar, north of Dhaka (The Daily Star 2004b).<sup>127</sup> Having been taken into custody, *Picchi Hannan* was allegedly killed by RAB on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August<sup>128</sup>. In a pattern that became a trademark, RAB reported that they had taken Hannan with them to arrest some of his accomplices and he had died in an ensuing gun battle (Human Rights Watch 2006: 26). This pattern has become known as *crossfire*. This represented the first high profile success for RAB and reportedly sent a serious message of intent to other such figures (Ibid).

The subsequent role of RAB arresting or killing many of the *mastan* was not confined to the figureheads, but also took out those lower in the hierarchy. After the death of Hannan, Babul, for example, was shot in the feet by RAB. Though not killed, he was permanently disabled in what appears to be a common but lower form of punishment meted out by RAB. The once powerful Babul became known as *lengra Babul* (crippled Babul). He became an addict, slept at the bazar and recently died of an overdose. It is this sense of *mastan* fading away that was described by the low-level Hawkers League leader at the beginning of this section. Similarly, immediately following Hannan’s death Sahib Ali, one of his bodyguards, took control of his network at Karwan Bazar, before himself also allegedly being killed by RAB<sup>129</sup>.

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<sup>126</sup> As Human Rights Watch (2006) note however, *crossfire* is not only the domain of RAB, with the police significantly involved in such killings.

<sup>127</sup> A letter to the editor of *The Daily Star* (dated July 26th 2004) asks ‘Picchi Hannan reportedly offered a little gift of Tk 50 lakh to RAB officials. Who are the other men who enjoyed the gifts of Picchi Hannan in the past?’ (The Daily Star 2004c).

<sup>128</sup> In leaked classified cables from the US Embassy in Dhaka from 2005, the death of Picchi Hannan is referenced, stating ‘opposition figures alleged that Hannan and victims with BNP links were killed to protect BNP “godfathers”’ (US Embassy cable 2005).

<sup>129</sup> Descriptions also suggest that the public played a role in the downfall of *mastan*. A young labourer Mamun described seeing the public beating of a former “godfather” from Karwan Bazar: *They beat him with a five-kilo weight. They started hitting his head again and again, and on his feet and every joint. The public beat him... His name was Ditton. He was set on fire. After all of this, he didn’t die!... You can’t believe how severely he was beaten. But it’s strange, every time he could still stand up and run away. He would run away, be caught and then again be beaten. Even after being set on fire he didn’t*



Over the coming years RAB and the police radically changed the fabric of urban society in Bangladesh, killing or arresting many other *mastan*, and forcing others to flee to India as fugitives. Some *mastan* however managed to move into party politics, becoming leaders of the various wings to the ruling party. Some are identified in Karwan Bazar as having become vegetable wholesalers. Those lower level *rongbaj* who were not killed or imprisoned became small business owners or labourers. Nazir, who we heard from earlier, explained the significance of this:

*when I was in jail RAB arrested my boss and shot him, all of his gang scattered and went in different directions to save their lives, and so the group ended. It's because of this that it's completely different to before.*

This sense that the situation today is *completely different to before*, and that these gangsters are from a past era, was a common one. In Karwan Bazar and secondary research sites a peculiar transition in power has occurred, with many of the roles associated with these gangs very clearly continuing. Hence you will often hear *there are no mastan here now*, but there are evidently murky, dangerous, often armed, figures running any given locality. Rather than being *mastan* gangs, the key figures identified as powerful today are almost always explicitly party political. In Karwan Bazar for example the party wings that had been rivals to *Picchi Hannan*, that had been sidelined or subservient, have become dominant. Nozrul, a young vegetable wholesaler, explained this transition in power:

*There used to be many shontrash here. They used to extort people, take money from them. These killers were shontrash, but they weren't involved in politics. Now these types of offences have been reduced but what has happened? Now the people on the government's side are doing the same thing! Haven't you seen them? Now all day they stick posters on the walls, they are all thieves. They have captured this place and after capturing it take money from people on the street. Isn't it torture?*

One journalist described this change to me in terms of there being *no non-political criminals now*. It is the wings of the ruling party that have taken control, for example the *jubo league* (youth league), *chattro league* (students league) and *Sramik league* (workers league), and this was a common finding across Dhaka. It is they who are now pre-eminent in ensuring local security (or insecurity), who are regulating businesses, calling people to political meetings, collecting *chanda* and generally taking their cut. A newspaper report from 2009, documented this transition in Karwan Bazar, citing a vegetable wholesaler

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*die. He's like a coy fish [a fish that can survive outside of water for a long time, and apparently even climb trees] ... There's nothing like these godfather now. The phenomenon of mastan being beaten, sometimes to death, by the public is one I heard of on a number of occasions in Dhaka. This phenomenon has some resonance with Hossain's (2010) notion of 'rude accountability', albeit in a more extreme form than the examples she focuses upon.*

After the death of Picchi Hannan, other extortionists had also gone into hiding and we were running our business smoothly. But soon after the formation of [the] new government, various groups introducing themselves as the leaders and activists of Chattra League, Jubo League and Sechhashebak League [volunteers league] have started visiting our business places and demanding tolls. Even these groups have been locked in clashes among themselves over establishing supremacy in the area. We are very much concerned and worried over such illegal toll collection from us by the associate bodies of ruling Awami League (The Bangladesh Today 2009)

The notion of the decline in *mastan* is also supported by Hossain's (2012) finding that in his studied area *mastan* were challenged around 2003 by local residents with the backing of some police and political leaders to retake control of the *bosti* bazar. The bazar has since been in the hands of 'ruling political party supporters, but their activities are not that different to those of the previous *mastan* group' (Ibid: 213). At Osmani Uddyan park, the *chanda* networks run by the once powerful *kangali* Zakir and his gang are nor firmly under the control of the *Jubo League* and *Sramik League*. The rise of gangsters during the 1990s in Bangladesh was described in chapter three as representing the 'criminalisation of politics' (Sobhan 2004). What this more recent transition since the early 2000s seems to indicate is, to turn the phrase around, rather the further 'party politicisation of criminality'. Understood within the LAO framework, the decline of gangsters in these contexts along with their replacement by party political actors suggests that the forms through which a capability for violence can be organised and successfully included into a ruling coalition have changed.

It is important to note however that though *mastan* groups or gangs are not seen as dominant in Dhaka today, they have not been entirely killed off. I heard of previous gangs still operating in some minimal form in the slums of Mirpur for example, and this resonates with recent research (Atkinson-Sheppard 2016). Furthermore, the term *mastan* is still occasionally used, and at Karwan Bazar today it has two main meanings: it can be first used to refer to low level hijackers, some only just in their teens, who rob people coming from the train at nearby Tejgaon station, or perhaps cut through a CNG roof to take a mobile phone. This is similar to how people are described *doing mastani* (*mastani kora*) (Devine 2007). Second, *mastan* will occasionally be used to refer to armed fighters, sometimes also termed "*killer*", who may be called to be involved in a fight, but who is not seen as having the control and power of the *mastan* from a previous era, and can in fact refer to party political actors<sup>130</sup>.

Interestingly, the decline of *mastan* gangs has led to a significant decrease in day-to-day violence, and this was a constituent finding across all research contexts. In the period of *mastan* gang rule, there was extreme inter-gang conflict, widespread hijacking and robberies, and high-risk employment opportunities for the *kangali*.

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<sup>130</sup> It should also be noted also that there are reports of once powerful *mastan*, for example *Sweden Aslam*, still in some capacity operating from behind the scenes, directing activities from inside prisons (Dhaka Tribune 2014).

Although there is still factional conflict, levels of violence and robberies have dramatically decreased. At Karwan Bazar this was clear from the experiences of larger businessmen as well as labourers. Though party political actors have power to extort businesses in open spaces, wholesalers described generally being protected from such extortion, and unlike before it is highly unlikely that they will be kidnapped and held to ransom. Elsewhere in Dhaka, a sewage worker living in Osmani Uddyan park expressed the transition like this:

*There's a huge difference between then and now. 10 or 12 years ago we couldn't sleep with that much money. The hijackers would come and beat us to take all our money. They would come with pistols and bombs and we wouldn't dare to talk to them because we were afraid. But now we aren't tortured like this. When the Awami League came into power these things stopped. There used to be hijackers inside this place from 6pm to the azam. They were here the whole night. After this government came they put one truckload of police here all night, and another truck on that corner, and another in front of Nagar Bhaban, and another in front of the High Court. Now they have put border guards on the streets.*

Only tentative answers can be offered to the question of why this transition has led to a decrease in overt violence, and this will be explored more in the conclusion. Furthermore, these arguments are not intended to suggest that these contexts are no longer violent. Indeed, the second half of this chapter argues that the capability for violence of the Awami League is in some senses greater than that of *mastan* gangs, due to the closer connection to the police and apparatus of the state. As will be explored in chapter eight, there are still extremely violent forms of competition as factions attempt to enter into the ruling coalition, challenge their control over resources, or form a new coalition. The following section examines the intermediaries prevalent in the lives of the *kangali* today and offers insight into the nature of the relationships the *kangali* have with them.

## 6.2. INTERMEDIARIES AND THE RULING COALITION

*David brother, do you know who the biggest shontrash in Bangladesh is? Them! The Awami League!*

Shumon, a *jupri* labourer, watching an Awami League meeting at Karwan Bazar

The first half of this chapter argued that *mastan* gangs are no longer dominant in the lives of the *kangali* in Dhaka city, however that many of the roles once associated with these gangs continue under an explicitly party political guise, controlled by actors more closely integrated within the ruling political party. The remainder of this chapter deepens an understanding of who these actors are and how the *kangali* relate to them. The key argument developed is that access to personal security, employment and the

right to do business is often contingent on relationships with a set of actors oriented around the ruling political party and apparatus of the state, particularly the police. These actors are associated with a capability for violence, and - from the perspective of the *kangali* - are perceived as operating in coordination with one another, with low-level Awami League politicians particularly able to control and draw upon the capability for violence of the police. These findings substantiate the posited relationship between a capability for violence and intermediation. A premise of this analysis is that social order stems from a ruling coalition maintaining a dominant capability for violence over rivals (North et al 2009), and that this coalition weaves down to the grass roots through factions (Khan 2010a). Although this overarching framework cannot be validated through understanding the lives of the *kangali*, evidence of the relationship between intermediation and a capability for violence provides indirect corroboration of this framework, and justifies the theorised relationship between violence and intermediation developed in chapter two. If the ruling coalition is dominated by party political actors (Khan 2010a) then evidence from the lives of the *kangali* suggests that the lowest rungs are dominated by the constituent and affiliated bodies of the Awami League, as well as the police, who control Dhaka on a territorial basis.

Across the research contexts, a consistent tapestry of actors emerge within and around these actors, as illustrated at the top half of figure seven<sup>131</sup>. This includes police and RAB informers, political leaders and followers including toll collectors known as *linemen*. The relationship between the *kangali* and these actors are oriented around two key processes: first, the extraction of financial benefits in exchange for access to resources such as personal security, work or the right to do business; second, party political actors also rely on the *kangali* to demonstrate their own capability for violence, and they are particularly used as a resource for more extreme forms of violence. The interests of these actors are enforced through violence, sometimes utilising or threatening to utilise, the police or courts. This is not however to suggest that these relationships cannot have more complicated dynamics – and descriptions of these will be given – but to emphasise that the *kangali* are often perceived as of little value other than as a source of violence or money.

Alongside these party political actors and the police sit a range of actors who have a more ambiguous status in relation to the ruling coalition. NGOs operate to a limited extent as intermediaries in the lives of the *kangali*. They do not have a direct capability for violence, and rarely confront the interests of ruling party actors where they have conflicting interests; and the way in which they operate to some extent aligns with the interests of actors within this coalition. Guards and sweepers do have a direct capability for violence, which they occasionally utilise to extract *chanda*, however

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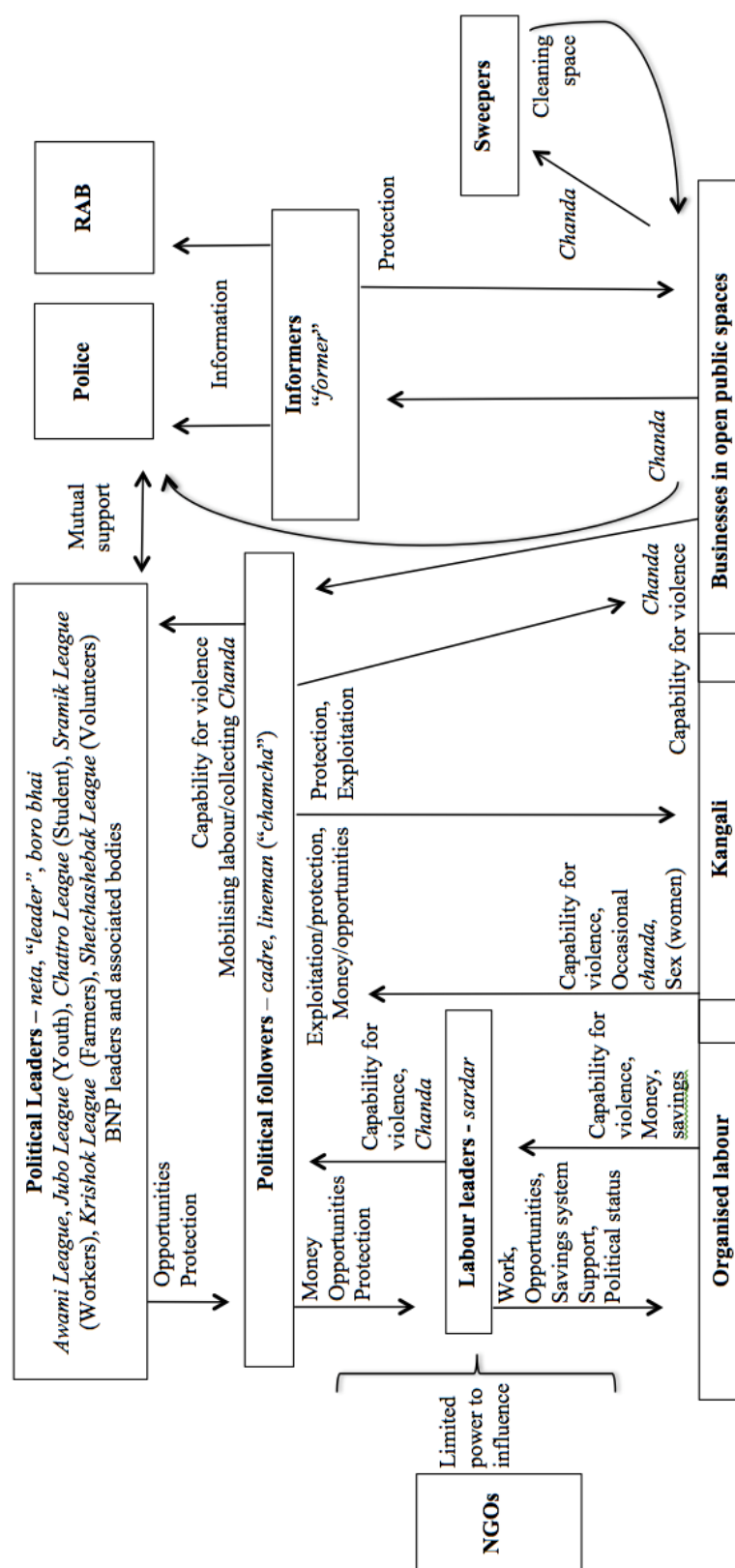
<sup>131</sup> Figure 3 distinguishes between *kangali*, organized labour and businesses in open spaces. All three categories describe the *kangali*, however the latter two categories are intended to describe arrangements and relationships specific to people in these areas of work.

they do not feature prominently in the research contexts<sup>132</sup>. Finally – and perhaps more ambiguously – organised labour often have a very clear capability for violence, they control resources (contracts for work for example) and have often very close relationships to political parties. Organised labour has a complex relationship to actors within the ruling coalition, and are often a means through which political parties develop and demonstrate a capability for violence. The rest of this chapter therefore helps frame what the social order looks like at this level of society, while the next chapter offers a more detailed account and cases of labour leaders as a prominent means through which the *kangali* relate to this social order.

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<sup>132</sup> It should be acknowledged that there are further forms of intermediation present in the lives of the *kangali*, such as the village networks that often bring people to particular street-slums in Dhaka city, friendship groups and religious networks around *mazar*. In general however these operate in an environment dominated by the forms of intermediation focused upon here, hence the focus of this and subsequent chapters.

FIGURE 7: URBAN SOCIAL ORDER FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE KANGALI



### 6.2.1. CONTROLLING THE STREETS

For the *kangali* to operate a business on the pavement, to be secure or to seek opportunities, relationships with important and powerful actors are often necessary<sup>133</sup>. The lower levels of urban life in Dhaka city are principally controlled by a coalition of actors centred around the Awami League and the police. A primary means by which the Awami League have a presence at this level of society are through their affiliated and member organisations, including the *Chattro League* (a student organisation working under the Awami League), *Jubo League* (the youth wing of the Awami League) and *Sramik League* (a federation of trade unions tied to the Awami League). These are organised by, and spread across, Dhaka's 93 wards (across Dhaka North and South City Corporations). Leaders with formal designation of ward level Awami League organisations (for example the presidents and secretaries) are often referred to through the terms "leader", *neta* (leader) or more often and colloquially *boro bhai* (big brother). Similar to the term *dada* in India, *boro bhai* can have strong and explicitly political connotations<sup>134</sup>. At the same time, the term *boro bhai* is used more generally in Bangladeshi society to indicate hierarchy, respect and dependencies. People without designation underneath Awami League leaders may also be referred to in this way, as are labour leaders and as were the *mastan* of a former era. Zakir, a young labourer at Karwan Bazar, explained the transition in *boro bhai* at Karwan Bazar

*Previously the Karwan Bazar boys were powerful, but now they don't have that much power. There were lots of boro bhai, but now there aren't any. There's been lots of change. There aren't boro bhai like before. They've left to do different work like garments, they've changed their lives. Now the people who have the power are the ones who are in the political party, they are the boro bhai now.*

Asking the *kangali* across Dhaka who the *boro bhai*, *neta* or "leader" are in any particular area will most often lead to the identification of a leader in a wing of the Awami League. At Karwan Bazar *Ahmed bhai*, *Palash bhai*, *Maola bhai* (Golam Maula Chowdhury Mala<sup>135</sup>) from the *Tejgaon Awami League* are all commonly identified as key figures.

Political leaders are supported by followers who are commonly termed *cadre*. Similar to its use in English, *cadre* has connotations of a standing army or a force. *Cadre* are

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<sup>133</sup> As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, labour leaders are critical intermediaries but have been purposefully excluded from the descriptions here and are the subject of the next chapter. This chapter helps frame the environment in which labour leaders operate, and also helps understand the lives of the *kangali* who do not work through labour leaders.

<sup>134</sup> A recent headline in The Daily Star (2015), asked simply 'who is the big bro?' in response to claims that the killing of an Italian man had been directed by a mid-ranking BNP leader.

<sup>135</sup> The same Maula that allegedly ordered the Chattro League to throw bricks at Khaleda Zia's convoy when she campaigned at Karwan Bazar for the Dhaka City North Corporation mayoral election later in April 2015 (NewsBangladesh 2015).

sometimes derogatorily referred to as *chamcha*, indicating a “yes man”, someone who sucks up to a leader, always agreeing and praising him (for they are mostly men). An Awami League leader and his followers function as a faction, and exist in hierarchical relations with the wider political infrastructure (Suykens 2016). The political authority above the local level bodies of the Awami League is perceived as the Member of Parliament<sup>136</sup>. While it is common for different Awami League bodies to be active in the same ward, they often have unequal power and control, such that in particular areas of Dhaka certain Awami League bodies are more powerful than others. In practice these organisations have complex relationships to one another as well as the central Awami League. As is widely documented in the media, they are often in rivalry with one another for authority and resources, resulting in violent factional conflict (Ibid).

A predominant way in which the *kangali* interact with these figures is through paying money as a form of tolls or protection/extortion payment for the ability to run a business. Day to day this is the domain of the *cadre* and in particular, the followers of political leaders called “*linemen*” who collect what is locally known as *chanda*. *Chanda* has a very prominent place in Bangladeshi public consciousness. It is best understood as somewhere between a fee, a toll, extortion and protection money, and as distinct from *bara* (rent); in some contexts *chanda* can mean membership or subscription money. It is also ubiquitous. Salam, a labourer in the *jupri* group told me *wherever you will go in Bangladesh you will find chanda*, and according to Neymar, the sewer worker, *this has been going since the British period!* *Chanda* can be seen as an important and deep rooted means through which the lower level rungs of the ruling coalition gain resources.

In Dhaka, as elsewhere in the world, economic activity on public land is regulated in qualitatively different ways. Some comes under the auspices of DCC and other government authorities and is formally regulated with leases, contracts and rents. Much however – the footpaths, streets, parts of the bazars, parking lots and parks for example – is managed by party political actors, the police, and to a lesser extent sweepers, guards and DCC. An immense number of businesses operate from here, selling everything from tea, mobile phones, old coins, sexual health medicines and t-shirts. A small percentage of these are run by the *kangali*. *Chanda* is levied primarily on the basis of access to space and a right to do business. Payments can be made in the process of establishing a business, as well as in maintaining a continued “right” to run it. The *linemen* are well publicised by media and a flurry of articles lambasts their activities annually at *Eid* as they ramp up demands. They are often referred to doing *chandabaji* colloquially. Shamim described the *chanda* system at Karwan Bazar to me:

*Everyday money is extorted in the market. Crores of taka... here everywhere in the market people are taking money. If today you are the member of Awami*

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<sup>136</sup> The web of actors prevalent at this level are undoubtedly more complicated, however I am presenting the web as it is perceived and presented by the *kangali*.



*League, you have power, which you can use to earn free easy money. Tomorrow if BNP are in power then their members are in power, they make money and you sit back. Here every day 500 taka for a shop is being paid. I may send my men, maybe four of them, telling them "go and pick up the payments" so they will move around the area taking the money from all the shops. The money picked is sent to higher ranking people who are stronger in the area, like political members – the MP of the area... Once it goes up the chain, each person keeps a cut and part is given to the police. It's a vertical chain with links to politics.*

In a previous era, *chanda* was a key source of revenue for *Picchi Hannan* and similar gangsters, and a point of conflict with the wings of the Awami League and BNP. Today, Karwan Bazar is meticulously divided into different areas or *line* (hence “*linemen*”), controlled by different wings of the Awami League. To the west of the bazar near WASA the *Jubo League* is in control, to the north near Ershad building it is the *Sramik League* who also partly control the (lucrative) rail line where the drug businesses operate, and towards the south with the fish market it is the *Shetchashebak League* (volunteers league) who also control further south towards the Sonargaon hotel. *Linemen* and the *cadre* are all identified as earning significant amounts of money, able to save up *lakh* of *taka*, and therefore they can be looked at with jealousy and resentment by those beneath them such as the labourers in the *jupri* group. Whatever money they take, they are always understood as taking a cut before passing it to their seniors. The sense of *chanda* being given up the political ranks is a common one. It is often claimed that *these are the MPs men*, or *this money will go right up to the Minister*<sup>137</sup>. The tall *linemen* Rajib who collects near WASA for example is thought by the *jupri* labourers to have saved up personally around 15-20 *lakh taka*. Shumon described him as a *rongbaj* (criminal, gang member), and as having moved up the political ranks by being very nice to senior people, becoming a low level leader of *Shetcha Shebak League* (volunteers league) before moving to the *Jubo League*<sup>138</sup>.

Elsewhere in Dhaka political power is similarly territorialised. Hence while at the university it is the *Chattro league* who have strength, to the east near Osmani Uddyan park it is the *Jubo League*, and I found further east towards Gulistan park it was the *Sramik League*<sup>139</sup>. The configuration of local power across Dhaka city is highly

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<sup>137</sup> It should be acknowledged that this analysis is based on experiences at the lowest level of this system – the exchanges between *kangali* and the *linemen*. Where the money goes afterwards can only be inferred from the perceptions of those running the businesses.

<sup>138</sup> It is these *neta*, their *cadre* and *linemen*, who fit to stereotypes of the *mastan*. Often wearing their nice shirts and sunglasses, riding on new motorbikes. A further label given to some of the *cadre* (but not the leaders) is *rongbaj*, meaning gangster or criminal, and there is continuity in terminology from the era of *mastan*.

<sup>139</sup> It was interesting to note that in a very few instances near the University and Osmani Uddyan park, shop keepers described BNP actors still occasionally collecting *chanda*, but often only doing so when Awami League people would not see them. Neymar described the *chanda* network at Osmani Uddyan park as such: *the BNP guy is bad, he comes secretly to the linemen on Monday, and the linemen gives him 100 taka*. During research in 2013, I also heard descriptions from teenagers at Karwan Bazar about

complex, and shifts in terms of the relationship between party political actors and the police, the balance of power and negotiations between them. In some areas you find the police and no Awami League controlling the *chanda*, or visa versa. *Lineman* are sometimes portrayed as directly under political leaders, sometimes as freer agents who are in-between the political leaders and the police, and sometimes as directly under the police<sup>140</sup>. Sometimes police take *chanda* directly, sometimes they use *linemen*, and sometimes even the *kangali* are used to collect *chanda*. Sometimes people have to pay both a *lineman* and a *chamcha*, implying different chains. Other actors including DCC staff and even sweepers also take *chanda*. Government salaried sweepers are assigned particular streets, and businesses on public space are often required to pay five or ten *taka* per day to them.

Many of the women and children living at Karwan Bazar scavenge/steal vegetables at night, which they sell in the early hours or morning. Some sell on the land of *arotdar*, paying them a fee or rent of between 30-50 *taka* a day. Those on the main paths have to pay *chanda* at a rate of around 50 *taka*, with 10 *taka* going to the sweepers, 20 *taka* going to the police and a further 20 *taka* going to political leaders. Nearby in *Fokini Bazar* (beggars market) beneath the Tejgaon flyover, similar sellers pay 10 *taka* to the *thana* (police station), 10 *taka* to the local *Awami League club* (which has a building facing the bazar beneath the flyover), and 5 *taka* to the *sweepers*. More generally, payments vary from 30-70 *taka* daily for smaller shops, and 50 to hundreds of *taka* for larger ones<sup>141</sup>. In addition to these payments, police and political leaders often help themselves to cigarettes, tea, snacks, and thereby eat into, or eat up, the owner's profit for the day. Not everyone is required to pay however. A general distinction is that businesses which have a "*station*" or are "*fixed*" as it often put, do have to pay, whereas street hawkers moving around do not. As Anika, who occasionally sells bottled water on the streets near Osmani Uddyan Park told me, *the holder is tied on my neck, so wherever I go this is where I can do business. It's not like I am fixed so have to give a fixed amount of money.*

The involvement of police and political actors in local economic affairs goes beyond taking from shops. *Chanda* is ubiquitous in Dhaka City. At the lowest levels these actors collect payments from drug businesses, rickshaw *wallah* and labour leaders. During my fieldwork Ansar (a government security force) started to levy a 10 *taka* fee for people sleeping on the streets to the south of Karwan Bazar. Tangential to my focus

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being under the leadership of *boro bhai* who were students from the Dhaka University wing of the *Chattro Dal* (the BNP student body), however in 2014-2015 these links appeared to have disappeared.

<sup>140</sup> There is an inherent ambiguity in the identities of some of these actors. Mamun described to me ordinary people collecting the *chanda*, then they give it to the "*leader*", the *tolish* and "*police*". *Tolish* here is a word that is intended to resemble the sound of police, indicating people who resemble the police, but are not.

<sup>141</sup> In terms of payments to the police, typically this is divided between paying the police on duty, and paying the *thana* (police station). If, for example, there are during the course of a business day four police on duty in your area, that may be four ten *taka* payments, in addition to a weekly payment to the local *thana*. In other areas, payments are centralised but understood to go to senior officers at the *thana* and *fari* (a sub unit of police station), as well as duty police.

I also heard about the *bepari* – those coming to sell their goods – are required to pay 50 *taka* for entry into the east side of Karwan Bazar (near WASA) to the *Jubo League*. The respective bodies of the Awami League take a commission from many of the labourers for each sack of vegetables they transport from a truck to the wholesaler. Rickshaw vans for transporting long distances (single vans) as opposed to unloading (double vans) are required to pay Ansar 10 *taka* for leaving Karwan Bazar. The distinction between *chanda* and informal toll is ambiguous. Many shops have to pay a weekly tax to DCC, and more generally (beyond the world of *kangali*), cars arriving at the bazar are required to pay an informal toll to DCC for parking (20 *taka* for non-government vehicles, 10 *taka* for government vehicles per day)<sup>142</sup>.

*Chanda* and *ghush* (bribes) are one of the main reasons the *jupri* group are great advocates of the sentiment that *the police are Bangladesh's number one shontrash*<sup>143</sup>. Far from any ideals about justice and law enforcement, the police are perceived as a continuous and day-to-day nuisance. As Shumon put it to me simply – *police means bribes, with bribes there is no problem, without bribes there will be no love*. Closely connected to the police are a further important figure of authority at Karwan Bazar, known as the *former* (informer). As a young labourer Akash told me, *there are many. Imran former. Shamim former. Tuunda [meaning crippled, without limbs] former, Sajid, Kalu... He's so black that's why he's called Kalu*. Mamun described them – *they have a good connection with the authorities and secretly pass lots of information to them*. I met Shamim on a number of occasions, he was described to me as a previous *mastan* from Mirpur turned *former*, whose disability (a crippled arm) came from having been beaten by the rail line drug dealers (*they were too disturbed paying him money all the time so they beat him*, said Mamun). Whenever I met him he was always extremely high on phensedyl, which he got for free from the rail line *bosti*, and I was suspicious why he insisted on taking my phone number almost as soon as we shook hands. I learnt that while Shamim was the police informer, Sajid was the RAB informer. Mamun continued:

*There are informer not just for drugs, but if there are other crimes like group fighting, or people bringing knives or pistols. It's his job to inform the authorities. If he sees any things like these are happening then he will call the DB [detective branch] and then the police will come.*

Everyone wants to keep in the *former's* good books. *Shamim is a powerful man because all the police listen to him*, Liton told me. Rickshaw van drivers kept a good relationship with him, often taking drugs together, but were also regularly extorted by

<sup>142</sup> On the West side of Karwan Bazar, a man in his early 30s Nazdi does this job. He got the work through a *boro bhai* and though not on the DCC payroll, takes a cut of the money he gets from the collections.

<sup>143</sup> I found other people elsewhere in Dhaka more sympathetic to their situation. A sewage worker at Osmani Uddyan park for example explained to me: *There's a reason why the Bangladeshi police torture people this much. How much does a Bangladeshi constable make? What's the government salary? "Fish"! 7500 taka. But to stay in a good room you need at least 10,000 taka. He needs 10,000 for a room rent, and he's making 7500 taka for his salary. If he doesn't steal what else can he do?*

him. The *former* benefit from receiving payment from the police in exchange for information, but also collect *chanda* from businesses in much the same way as the *linemen*. He *earns from both sides*, as Mamun put it. He has a contract (*chukti*) with the rail line drug dealers for example. The *former* play on their position, Mamun continued, *they never show the real criminals*, because they benefit from them. When the police come on patrol, *he tells everyone to stay hidden*, instead showing the police other people who they put on the vans, beat, extort and then set free.

Unlike many of the *mastan* from a previous era who are able to shift with the political currents, under competitive clientelism there are very clear time horizons for the political *boro bhai - neta* of today. At Karwan Bazar I often tried to understand the *jupri* group's and young labourers' perceptions about the attractiveness of being a *lineman*, a *cadre*. Some – as will become clearer later – had real aspirations, while others were far more sceptical. I suggested to Mamun that collecting *chanda* could be a good way to get money, he said

*How?! Your party will fall and then people will start beating you. Now it's Awami League, but if BNP comes, the person taking the money right now won't be there. He'll hide. If your party isn't ruling, then the public will beat you. They will break your feet and hands.*

Referring to the political leaders at Karwan Bazar mentioned above – Ahmed, Palash, Maola – Zakir said that once BNP come into power, *they will pull up their lungi and run away! Otherwise they will all be shot*. *Cadre* have been known to be publically beaten, even to death. Shamim spoke of some leaders *sitting down* and others *standing up* as the parties alternate. Leaders are positioned differently, some may be able to simply sit down and maintain a low profile, while others have to flee. Mamun went on to nuance his position, explaining that

*Those who are supporting BNP won't express it. If I'm your friend and I do BNP, but you are doing Awami, so right now your party is sitting in the chair not mine, then you will take care of me. So when my party is sitting in the chair, I will support you.*

The capability for violence of the party political actors discussed in this section is time bound with the stability of the wider coalition in which they operate. How people are situated in relation to the opposition may differ – some leaders have to flee, while others can perhaps sit down, and rely on their contacts with the opposition to see them through their rivals' time in power. It should be noted that through the course of writing this thesis and during fieldwork, the political climate in Bangladesh has changed significantly, with far less hope for BNP activists and political leaders to regain control or power. How this latest political development will alter what has been described here cannot be answered, however is a question further reflected on in the conclusion.

### 6.2.2. VIOLENCE AND ITS THREAT

Relationships with actors analysed in the previous section are often described by the *kangali* in violent terms. The often stark imbalance in the capability for violence that these actors have in relation to the *kangali* mean that they can enforce their interests through the use or threat of violence. At the same time, for party political actors, the *kangali* are often looked to as a way in which they can maintain their own status as having a capability for violence as well as that of the coalition in which they operate, and are therefore used for violence purposes. The inter-dependencies that these relationships have can therefore be complex. In practice the ways in which these actors use their capability for violence differs, and while there is a systemic vulnerability to abuse and exploitation, these figures can also protect the *kangali*.

In the cases of the *linemen*, *former* or police, paying the *chanda* can bring a degree of protection against other actors threatening a business<sup>144</sup>. A leader who is powerful enough to collect the *chanda* has an interest in businesses operating and continuing to pay. In only very few instances is the burden of *chanda* so great that it threatens the existence of a business, though in some cases it impinges significantly on people's livelihood. As Mamun put it *think, if you set up a shop next to the road, you are earning money, you earn 20 taka, so you have to pay 2 taka, so you still have 18 taka, so there's no problem for you*. In principle an informal right gained in paying *chanda*, offers a degree of protection from smaller actors who could threaten a business, and the right of being forewarned when a mobile court<sup>145</sup> will take place, helping them protect their assets from being smashed up in an eviction. In practice many people do not receive such protection.

For small business people and labourers more generally (as will be explored in the next chapter), accessing work/the right to do business often also necessitates participation in the activities of political parties. This may simply mean participation in political rallies and meetings, but can also mean fighting off challengers or rival factions, and more extreme forms of violence such as throwing molotov cocktails or attacking public vehicles. The ruling party – and to a lesser degree the opposition – mobilise people in this way through a mixture of financial incentives and the threat of violence. Opposition to the interests of political leaders and their followers – by not paying *chanda* or not attending political meetings for example – is often met with violence<sup>146</sup>, and this violence is sometimes inflicted through party leaders drawing on

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<sup>144</sup> The relationship between low-level business people and these linemen are more complicated than the dynamics I encountered and present here. The media has reported for example cases in the court between different hawkers organisations and these linemen, who have been publically named.

<sup>145</sup> A mobile court is a means by which the government conduct petty legal cases outside of a court. I observed many of these in relation to people living or operating businesses in public places. In practice they are often described by those affected as simply a means of certain actors getting *chanda*, before arrangements return back to normal.

<sup>146</sup> Though political leaders are particularly feared other actors also have the capability for violence. Even the government sweepers can evict small business people. Rifat who scavenges vegetables and sells them on the street at Karwan Bazar reported: *If I don't pay the sweepers then no-one will support me. Why would they? They would suffer. The sweepers have their groups, they have many people, so if*

the apparatus of the state (through their close connections to the police for example). A broad difference between how power is exercised by the party political actors described here, by contrast with the gangsters of a previous era, is the greater ability to rely on the support of the apparatus of the state. Such connections constitute part of such actors' 'holding power' (Khan 2010b), their ability to engage in conflict. There is then a sense in which the threat of violence is more convincing, representing greater power in Lukes' third dimension, the ability to influence others actions without resorting to direct force.

Rajak, who runs a mobile phone business and sleeps outside Bangabandu stadium described the Awami League *cadre* he pays *chanda* to, *if for some reason I don't show up to their event, they would maybe beat me up or have the police frame me for a crime I haven't committed*. Consistently, and across all my research sites, the question of what would happen were you not to pay the *chanda* were met with gestures of violence such as raising a hand preparing a slap. *They will kick you in the stomach*, the sewage *moyla* workers told me. People are therefore extremely fearful of political leaders. Anika told me in an interview referring to some new local Awami League *cadre* near Osmani Uddyan park: *Bhai, If I talk about them I will be beaten*<sup>147</sup>. This can be true for anyone, not just the *kangali*, as Shishir, who runs a tea stall at the university described it:

*The political people give me pressure... both Awami people and BNP... they say I have to either pay them money or come to their meetings... both parties do it... they could smash up my shop. Yesterday I had to go, I couldn't run my business the whole day.*

Political actors leverage the interests of the *kangali* to their advantage – examples people recounted to me include the threat of abducting a child, the threat of not being allowed to sleep in a certain area, the threat of a police case, the threat of being beaten, the threat of withdrawing protection from the police for a drug business, the threat of not being able to work in a bazar and the threat of not being able to run a business on a pavement.

As well as forcing the *kangali* to participate in political events or violence through the threat of violence, these political actors also offer opportunities. Examples of this in the context of labour groups will be explored in the next chapter. In terms of more extreme forms of violence such as bombing buses, throwing molotov cocktails and even killing people, boys and teenagers are particularly looked to. Labourers would often identify *kangali* who are drug addicted and do not live in any particular areas as

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*you don't pay they will come the next day and throw us out of the area, they would throw away our goods and destroy them.*

<sup>147</sup> People are often respectful to the faces of these leaders and their followers before rebuking them for being evil and corrupt behind their backs. Anika expressed how unclean and immoral they are: *if you go to their house, they have cats sleeping in their rice... if his father is having a biri* [a cheap local cigarette], *he's having benson* [an expensive cigarette].

being recruited for such work (though the reality is more complex as will be seen in chapter eight<sup>148</sup>). Rana, a van driver at Karwan Bazar, explained:

*It's not people like you or me who throw these bombs. Why? I want to develop myself. I don't want to throw a bomb. I don't need to be listed in a police diary and go to jail, I have a family, I have a child. But if someone's sleeping in the corner, the rasta-kangali-oshohi [road-destitute-helpless], they will go to them, ask them if they want to work, and start convincing them. There will be a "contract" of 10 to 20 thousand taka, and they will give 7, 8, 9 "cocktail". For him, he has no future. If you have a really bad situation, you don't have money, you can't eat three times a day, and then someone comes and asks you "will you work?" then of course you will say yes. Their hunger is their greatest desire. Maybe he will hit a car, or maybe a "meeting-missil", and instead he will get 20,000 or 50,000 taka. Or maybe he will give you a gun and 1 lakh, saying you should take it, it will be helpful for you. You're thinking now you're starving, but if you get 1 lakh it will be good luck. You just kill someone to get the money. He's a kangali. He needs money, and after throwing the bomb, if a person dies or a dog dies, it's not his business*

The police similarly regulate and enforce their interests through violence. In the lives of the *kangali* it is relatively common for police to threaten arrest or transportation to a rehabilitation centre, and leverage everyday activities like taking drugs, or gambling. The *jupri* group used to have an arrangement whereby they would pay the police 100 *taka* a day to ignore their gambling. When the group decided collectively to stop playing (because they were all losing too much money and not being able to eat for the rest of the day), they stopped giving. But when police subsequently came and asked them why they were not playing, the police said *well, you are all sitting here together so I will say you are playing, so give me 100 taka!* under the threat of arrest, as Liton described it.

The threat of violence also means that political leaders can pursue their interests in other ways. Women – particularly those without a male “guardian” – can be targeted by both political actors and the police, for sexual violence. Key transport terminals in Dhaka, *Sadarghat* and *Gulistan* for example, are focal points for women being picked up by political leaders and their associates. The *ghat neta* (boat launch leaders) at *Sadarghat*, a highly politicised position, are locally notorious for spotting the beautiful women, perhaps feeding them for a day or two, but also allegedly raping them. At *Osmani Uddyan* park this is also common, as Anika described it

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<sup>148</sup> The case developed in chapter eight gives an example of where participation in extreme forms of political violence is forced onto children through a labour leader, suggesting that the degree to which children have the choice of whether to participate depends. There is a deeper question regarding the extent to which the language of choice is in any case appropriate when discussing such situations in the context of childhood.

*This always happens. It happens in front of my own eyes. A lot of girls come here... a helpless [oshohi] girl comes here, she's new, she has no-one. The neta will kidnap her or they'll send a chamcha. They will feed her all day and then take her at night. In front of them we can't protect her, because if we try then they will beat us. We don't say anything. If I let a girl sit next to me, and then these people come and have sex with her in front of me, what can I say? If I don't accept it they will beat me and my husband.*

In the face of the threat and use of violence, third parties such as NGOs have some, albeit limited, capacity to protect. Shayla, a woman living at the nearby NGO centre, described the importance of NGO shelters to single women:

*If we live on the rasta, there are dogs and foxes, bad people, they will disturb us, if we don't go with them they will beat us. They will tease us [pinch our cheeks - galey tan debo], they will make us addicted to drugs, we are staying well here. We don't do drugs. No-one teases us, there's no "scope".*

But throughout Dhaka NGOs also described not being able to directly confront the interests of local political actors. Through their inability to act, they are submissive to the interests of the ruling coalition: *we can't say anything to these people, they will cause problems. If we said something, they could kill us. We have to stay cold...* I was told by an NGO worker at Karwan Bazar. In relation to the *ghat neta* at *sardarghat* an NGO centre manager described a similar situation:

*What can we do? Nothing. If we try and say something we won't be able to run the centre. The ghat neta have so much power. They could tell everyone that tomorrow they should not come here and the centre would be empty. One day a new girl came through the ghat and to the centre, she was staying here but two of the neta's men came to the centre and took her away. We couldn't do anything.*

A gross imbalance in the capability for violence in a context where there are not laws protecting the *kangali* on the basis of some form of rights, creates a severe vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. The experiences people have of course depend on – amongst other factors - the incentives and characters of the people they have relationships with. Alongside stories of abusive police and political leaders, there are therefore those of helpful and supportive ones, and it is important to appreciate that the capability for violence of the actors described are also utilised to protect and defend the *kangali*. Anika explained growing up near Osmani Uddyan Park

*When we were children we used to stay at a recycled goods shop owned by Nozrul Bhai, he was a big leader when BNP were in power. We used to keep our money with him. When there were programmes, he would call us "hey, do you want to go to the programme?" If we wanted to go we went, but we didn't have any good clothes, so he would buy us clothes from the market... No-one could say anything to us because no-one was above Nozrul Bhai. He wasn't*



*married. He saw us like his children and little sisters. Right now he is like our father, back then he was like our father.*

Similarly, Jahangir is a local low level *Awami League* leader at *Pantha Kunjo park* (next to *Karwan Bazar*) without any designation. He used to be a *very bad man*, a low level *mastan* as he was often described, carrying a pistol and collecting *chanda*. But now he's also an advocate of the *kangali*, someone who is seen as protecting them. He often spoke to me of being inspired by the *Quantum Method*, a new age group encouraging meditation and yoga. He is a likeable character, who is both shrewd and funny. Marium lived there for many years with her abusive drug-dealing husband. She described Jahangir

*Jahangir bhai helps everyone. Suppose at midnight, isn't there lots of bad women, they come in the night and they do many things because of their hunger. The reason is that they have no husband, mother, father, now they have to do something to survive. They have to do bad things. They used to stay the whole night on the street, when it is winter, the police use to beat them, people use to beat them, used to kick them, and they will spend the whole night like this. This way they will earn 500 or 1000 taka. Then the police will shout, saying "you, stand up! Where are you from? Where do you live? What do you do?" Then they reply that "we are poor women, we do what we have to do". They will say that they have earned 1000 or 1200 taka by prostitution. Then the police say "show me your money!" and grab it. So the women go to Jahangir crying, saying "Jahangir bhai, I am bad but I have not done something bad with him. Why has he done this to me? He took all my money by force". Then he says to them "come in the afternoon and you will get your money, you will get justice". Then she will be quiet. Jahangir will say, "is it a sin that she has done this? Should you take her money? What she had done, she has done because she is hungry" And then he will beat the person and take back the money. That bad woman will pray to allah for him, because she knows he is good... The only bad thing about him is that he smokes ganja*

In summary then, the *kangali* can be understood as often dependent on party political actors associated with the ruling party for work, security or opportunities. The logic of these relationships is that they provide access to resources at a price. Sometimes this is only financial, and may even bring a degree of protection, however it is often more complex, involving risky obligations and participation in party political activities. These relationships are premised on an unequal capability for violence, and in providing money or labour, serve to promote the interests of the ruling coalition. The actual impact of them on the *kangali* is however experience idiosyncratically, and while there are patterns or trends in the likely dynamics to the relationships, these are always permeated by other factors, including the vagaries of people's personalities.

### 6.3. CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that the *kangali* often depend on intermediaries to gain access to resources. These intermediaries are closely associated with a capability for violence however the form these actors take has changed markedly since the early 2000s. Most of the *mastan* gangs such as that led by the infamous *Picchi Hannan*, and identified as significant by urban literature from Bangladesh, have broken up, in large part due to a concerted effort by the government and the role of RAB and the police. This has led to a significant decrease in violence in the lives of the *kangali*. Many of the activities associated with these gangs continue, but are now directly organised under the ruling party political actors, such as the constituent and affiliated bodies of the Awami League. There are a complex array of actors organised around the Awami League and apparatus of the state such as *cadre*, *linemen* and *former*. Access to work or the right to do business gained through political actors is often contingent on political participation, as well as regular payments. Men are particularly obliged to participate politically. People adhere to the interests of these actors because their authority is premised on a clear and present capability for violence, which though not always used, can be convincingly threatened, and can draw upon the apparatus of the state. Not all actors who mediate access to resources are associated with violence – NGOs for example play important roles – however they face serious limits if their interest conflict with those of the actors described above. If social order is premised on a ruling coalition, the party political actors and the police described form some of the lowest level rungs of this. Underneath these actors however sit labour leaders, a pervasive and contextually powerful actor who often position the *kangali* in relation to the social order described, and have complex relationships to this ruling coalition. These actors are the subject of the next chapter.

## 7. LABOUR LEADERS, POLITICS AND FACTIONS

*If you want to be part of the jupri group, you have to fight*  
Abdul, a *jupri* labourer at Karwan Bazar

Labour leaders are a ubiquitous and powerful intermediary to whom the *kangali* - and urban poor more broadly - look to find work, security and opportunities. I met and heard about labour leaders wherever I researched. From the young labourers at the Inland Container Depot (ICD) who live at Kamalapur train station, to the drain workers living at Osmani Uddyan park and around Bangabandu stadium, to the coolie and rickshaw van drivers transporting vegetables at Karwan Bazar. All are organised under a labour leader, often straightforwardly called a *sardar*, sometimes called a *boro bhai*. The term labour leader is used here in an intentionally broad way. Similar to these *sardar*, the female leaders of street based sex workers are often described as doing *sardari*, otherwise termed *dalal* (middleman, or middlewoman in this case) or,

to the workers themselves, *ma* (mother). The disabled beggars outside the Supreme Court were previously led by two powerful *sardar* and continue to have a *samiti* (savings group, association), headed by a shrewd “*cashier*”. Even with the vegetable thieves and *tokai* I occasionally sensed a similar structure, with some of the younger generation closely associated with a recycled goods shop owner or local *boro bhai*. Though these leaders are clearly different characters and referred to in diverse ways, it is important to acknowledge a commonality in their roles. As has already been noted, despite their historical importance in colonial India, labour leaders have received little academic attention in Bangladesh (Bertocci 1970; Wood 1994; Khan 2000).

The key argument developed in this chapter is that studying the roles of labour leaders is important for understanding how the lower levels of political parties maintain their capability for violence, and critical for understanding how many of the *kangali* negotiate their place within the social order of urban Bangladesh. Some groups of labour operate factionally within the political hierarchy, they have clear hierarchies, are in competition with similar groups for territory and status and look upwards for political opportunities and support. The Awami League bodies described in the previous section look down to these factions as a source of support and to bolster and maintain their status. The capability for violence is often a critical characteristic of a labour group, particularly for those with political ambitions or in highly competitive environments. It is therefore also a quality looked for in labourers by such leaders. This chapter begins by mapping out the structural role and key characteristics of labour leaders within the wider social order. It then substantiates these arguments and explores these in detail in relation to the *jupri* group at Karwan Bazar, and gives examples of labour leaders in the context of sex workers, thieves, waste workers and beggars. These leaders are argued to play complex and contentious roles in the lives of the *kangali*.

## 7.1. 21ST CENTURY JOBBERS

### 7.1.1. LABOUR AND POLITICAL FACTIONS

Chapter three described labour leaders as critical intermediaries in colonial India. They were institutionalised within large-scale agriculture and industry to control workers and played multifaceted roles in the lives of labourers, roles that were often deemed immoral or exploitative within wider society. The history of labour leaders more generally within South Asia is tied to the systems of trade and caste groups, and from at least the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in Dhaka (and probably before), such groups had very clear leadership structures. The capability for violence of labour leaders was a key characteristic upon which their authority rested (Chakrabarty 1983; de Haan 1997; Chakrabarty 2000; Sen 2002; Bhattacharya 2004). Beyond the leader-labourers relationship, they are also identified as having used this capability to organise working class protests in colonial India (Chakrabarty 1983: 124), and in Kolkata there are descriptions of *sardar* becoming powerful *goonda* (Bhattacharya 2004), though the extent to which the capability for violence between *sardar* and *goonda* was similar is

disputed (de Haan 1997; Chakrabarty 2000). During the era of *mastan* in Dhaka there was a close relationship between organised labour and gangsters. In the context of Karwan Bazar the previous chapter described how leaders for truck drivers, butchers or *coolie* at times united the labour underneath them, becoming feared and powerful *mastan*.

Today labour leaders continue to play important roles in the urban social order of Bangladesh, roles that have been largely unrecognised in urban research to date. A premise of the framework used in this thesis – and that resembles the social order as seen from the perspective of the *kangali* – is that social order in Bangladesh rests on a ruling coalition which weaves its way down to the lowest hierarchical levels of urban life in the bazars, streets, parks, transport terminals and so on. It was argued in the previous chapter that the capability for violence is closely associated with figures within the ruling Awami League, and that these are organised through different bodies such as the *Jubo League*, *Chattro League* and *Sramik League*. Whereas a decade or so ago in Karwan Bazar labourers looked up to a social order dominated by *mastan* gangs, today they look up to party political leaders. Labour leaders represent a point at which the *kangali* and the ruling coalition these political actors represent, intersect. In the contexts studied, groups of organised labour have very complex relationships with political actors, including elements of competition, interdependency and exploitation.

The party political bodies described above look to groups of organised labour to demonstrate their own capability for violence. This was often described by labourers in the *jupri* group as these party political actors having a *need* for labourers to demonstrate their *strength*. Understood within the competitive clientelist framework, this represents a need for a party political faction to demonstrate that they have a superior capability for violence than rivals, thereby demonstrating to others, including their superiors, that they can maintain a legitimate place within the ruling coalition. Though political leaders are feared and powerful individuals, they and their *cadre* are often only a relatively small group in relation to the size of organised labourers. At Karwan Bazar for example, though political leaders are seen as extremely powerful those in their immediate circles are not identified – at least by the labourers I knew – as a large group. The capability for violence that political leaders have is seen by the *kangali* as coming in part from their close connection to the apparatus of the state (the police for example) by virtue of their political status, in part from having weapons (guns for example), but also by their ability to mobilise sufficient numbers of people towards violence, where and when it is needed. The forms this takes are diverse, as will be described later in this chapter and the next, but includes demonstrating support through political meetings or rallies, *hartal* or anti-*hartal* activities, or even more targeted in killings and bombings for example. Groups of organised labour are a resource on which these political actors need to draw to maintain their own status and promote the interests of the coalition in which they operate; and labour leaders are often the means through which they do so.

Labour leaders and the labourers they represent meanwhile also require political connections in order to gain and maintain their status and territory. Some labour leaders look up to political leaders for opportunities, whether it is to increase the work they have access to or receive money for participation in political activities. Furthermore, some labour leaders and their followers look up with jealousy at the power of those in the political party, and actively design to become political leaders or *linemen*. As a result labour leaders and political leaders have complex interdependencies. Money and protection can flow either way and the balance of power between these actors varies. Political leaders often look at organised labour and the value chains in which they operate as a source of *chanda*. Furthermore, the extent to which labourers have a choice in participating in such activities differ. Some groups of labourers are employed on an event by event basis and therefore flexible to operate with different political actors, while others are tied to a specific body of the Awami League through formal registration, and membership within that body. As will become clear, labour leaders do not always look to political leaders who are in power for opportunities, and may bet on a rival faction within the ruling party or even an opposition party leader to better further their interests. Labour leaders and groups can therefore be a threat to the power of the existing ruling coalition.

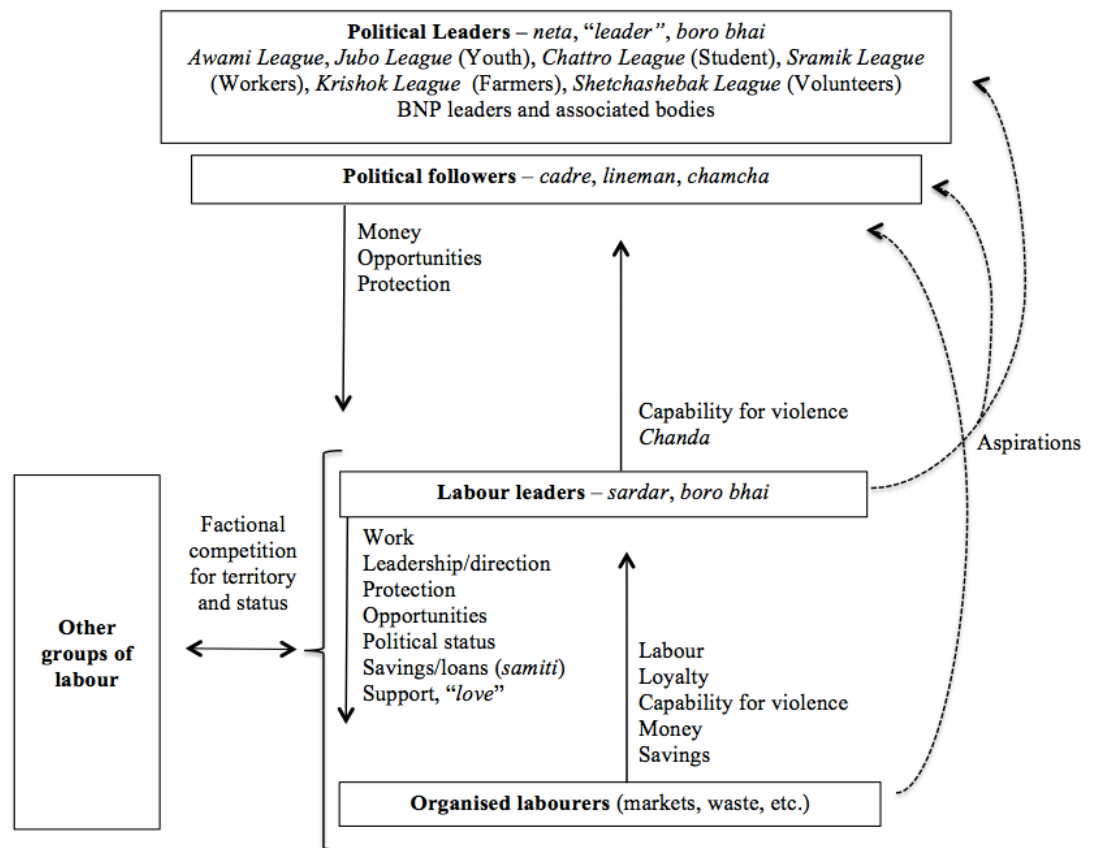
As indicated in the previous chapter, the value chains in which groups of labour operate are ones from which party political actors often seek resources, and therefore the distribution of work is inherently political in that it affects the ruling coalition and the basis on which social order rests. Groups of labour operate in conflict with other groups for work and territory, and this competition is often violent, utilising the political connections that groups have or can build. Because of these two facts, labour groups of this sort can be described as operating as factions (Nicholas 1965). Their complex interdependencies with the ruling coalition suggests that these labour groups should be conceptualised as the lowest form that factions take within the urban context, integrated within, or in competition to, the ruling coalition. The need to compete violently for work, and to appeal to party political actors on the basis of a capability for violence, translates down into the relationship between labour leaders and the labourers. The task of a labour leader is therefore often to ensure the unity and coherence of the group to operate in conflict with others. In practical terms, the viability of a labour faction is contingent on dynamics such as respect, fear, mutual support, and in the context examined spoken of in terms of *love*<sup>149</sup> and whether they “*adore*” each other. A social structure critical to the dynamics of these labour groups, was the role of a *samiti* (savings group, association), as is explored in more detail below. The structures of these differ – some require continual investment and deposits are returned after a fixed period, while others are more flexible, and deposits can be withdrawn as and when. Figure 4 below builds on figure 3 from the previous chapter, providing a more detailed overview of how labourers, labour leaders and political

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<sup>149</sup> Labourers often spoke of whether there was *bhalobasha* (love) between them and the *boro bhai* or *sardar*. Love in this context can be understood as meaning being cared for and looked after.

figures relate. It is important to appreciate that the elements of these relationships prominent in the experience of any particular group differ. Hence some groups are more reliant on political figures for authority and visa versa, some given *chanda* and others do not, all a product of the relative balance of power, incentives and negotiations that take place. The following sections substantiate and illustrate these arguments through empirical cases.

FIGURE 8: LABOUR-POLITICS NEXUS IN RESEARCH CONTEXTS



#### 7.1.2. MARKET LABOURERS AND LEADERS: THE JUPRI GROUP

At Karwan Bazar *sardar*, or *hodar* as they are known colloquially, are locally powerful actors organising the movement of vegetables, situated between the wholesaler, and the arrival and departure of trucks from and to rural areas. They typically organise a range of labour, including the *coolie* (those carrying goods in baskets on their heads), the *helper* (those facilitating this, unloading or loading by hand), and the rickshaw *baan* (van) drivers (those carrying goods on flat backed rickshaw vans). As with the *coolie*, many rickshaw van drivers operate at night under the control of a *sardar*, a

senior and powerful figure who often rents people under him their rickshaw vans, maintains links with the wholesaler and truck drivers regarding the arrival of goods to be unloaded, determines who can and cannot work under him, and subsequently pays his workers. They may have their name suffixed with the term, hence the name of the most proximate and powerful *sardar* to the *jupri* group – “*Dulal sardar*”. Dulal is now elderly. He described to me having worked at Karwan Bazar for over forty years and having forty rickshaw van drivers under him. *Sardar* typically receive daily rents from the vans that they own and rent to drivers (approximately 80-100 *taka* a day), along with a significant cut of the fee charged for the group to unload or reload the goods. The rough division is often understood by those in *jupri* as followed: from a fee of 20,000 for unloading and distributing goods in one night, the *sardar* would allocate 10,000 *taka* to the *coolie*, 5000 *taka* to the rickshaw van drivers, and take 5,000 for himself<sup>150</sup>. People estimate that Dulal *sardar* earns about 1.5 *lakh taka* a month.

The *jupri* group have a complicated relationship to Dulal *sardar*. Though he is the *sardar* for their lane (*goli*), they explicitly identify as not being under his control. This would often be expressed bluntly as in *we don't have a sardar, we have a serial*. A *serial* refers to a system for organising the way in which the van drivers unload goods from the trucks.<sup>151</sup> If you visit Karwan Bazar at night you will see rickshaw van drivers racing after trucks as they arrive. These vans have neither chains nor brakes, and so people are masters of running along van first (not bike first), dodging obstacles, hopping on and sliding along, competing to get to the truck first. Whoever touches the back bumper of the truck while it is motion and is able to remain in that prime position until it is stopped, gets the first lot of goods to deliver to the wholesaler, typically a larger proportion (and thereby earn most money). In practice this means that people end up smashing their vans against each other to get nearest to the truck, people can be easily injured and it often results in arguments and fights. Operating under a *sardar*, or using a *serial*, are both ways to avoid this. Under a *sardar* those able to unload are limited, the work is organised, and wages standardised. A *serial* is a nightly lottery within a limited group, organised most often by pieces of scrunched up paper being drawn from a hat, people thereby being allocated their turn randomly. The *serial* are associated with certain areas (*bhag*), and hence the *jupri* have the *serial* associated with their lane, for trucks that are not under the *sardar*<sup>152</sup>.

Despite this rhetoric of not having a *sardar*, as my research continued it became apparent that they were much more intimately connected to the logic of a *sardar* system than they presented it. Alongside the feeling that *we are all brothers, we have no leader*, the *jupri* group have very clear leaders, who are seen as *boro bhai*. Sayeed,

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<sup>150</sup> In addition to this because the *sardar* control the account, monitor and record the movements of goods, they have ways of taking further cuts from the fees.

<sup>151</sup> More broadly a *serial* can refer to a group savings system.

<sup>152</sup> In other areas there are a mixture of *serial* and *sardar*. In practice, the system is cheated. As Salman said - *there's a serial, but whoever runs the fastest, they get the money. The serial doesn't work*. Liton complained that *every night there's fighting. Not everyone is honest. Even though there is the serial people lie, they pretend they are in the serial when they aren't really. So then people fight*.

a younger van driver in the group, described these *boro bhai*: *Parvez bhai is top. Then Rubel. Then "mission Azad"*. These three characters grew up together in the old *Aparajeyo* centre for boys, having moved there from the *chinomul* centre. They were from the same "*batch*", as Rubel put it. Nazir, who we heard from in the previous section, described their role

*Rubel and Parvez are in control. They don't work. They don't stay here, but if there is any work it is under their control. Parvez and Rubel are our brothers. It is their responsibility. Everyone is with them. They are in charge otherwise there will be disorder, there will be arguments, do you understand?*

Rubel has a beard and is short and fat, as a younger van driver Akash put it. He dresses and acts as a *mullah*, with his Panjabi, and constant use of overtly religious language. He owns six rickshaw vans, which he rents out on a daily basis to others in the group<sup>153</sup>, but more importantly he has responsibility for controlling some of the contracts for unloading trucks and linking them to the wholesalers. He is thought by some to be earning 3000-4000 *taka* a night<sup>154</sup>.

The *jupri* group operate as a faction in that they are in conflict with other groups for work, have a clear leadership, are looked to as a group of labour available for party political violence, and their status is contingent on their position in relation to the political hierarchy. Their capability for direct physical violence is a key means by which the *jupri* group maintain their control over work and seek opportunities. Both leaders and followers in the group have this capability. The third of these *boro bhai*, "*mission Azad*" is called the "*fireman*" by Rubel (said while indicating a pistol) and is a *very powerful man* (indicating stabbing motions) who served twelve years in Dhaka Central Jail for crimes committed during the period of *Picchi Hannan*. It is particularly Azad and Parvez who specialise in violence. As Sayeed described it

*Rubel Bhai never wants to create violence [ganjam]. That's why everyone goes to Parvez, because Rubel doesn't like problems and doesn't want to get involved. Rubel bhai says "I eat my own food, I don't want to get involved in bad things, but if you need any suggestions I will give you some good advice".*

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<sup>153</sup> Particularly where there are not *sardar*, it is people who own vans who are looked to. You need to have a good relationship with a *boro bhai* (in this case simply someone who owns a van) in order to be rented one and therefore in order to work.

<sup>154</sup> Though they do not self-identify as having a *sardar*, it is worth reflecting on how in fact the group could operate without someone taking this structural role. A logic for having a *sardar* is to reduce the transaction costs of moving goods for the wholesaler. The *sardar* manages the contract, organises the labourers, and ensures the efficiency of the process. Without a leader of some sort, the wholesaler would have to deal with 10s of van drivers, which would be too inefficient. For some of the contracts on which *jupri* work, it is then Rubel who controls these. The primary difference seems to be that he is identified as one of them, though senior, he shares the same roots, has grown up in the same way, and therefore retains a common identity.



*That's why everyone goes to Parvez bhai because he used to go everywhere for fighting. I have observed Rubel, he always doing good things*<sup>155</sup>

In the case of all these *boro bhai*, the group go to them for advice and support on a daily basis. They ask for small loans, require their leadership if there are tension or fights. The names of these leaders carry respect; I once overheard Rubel say to a labourer – *if there is a problem, just give my name*, indicating the authority which their name and position commands. The obligations that followers have to these *boro bhai* range from being instructed in daily life (for example doing small favours for the *boro bhai* such as delivering tea and cigarettes, as is customary in any hierarchy in Bangladesh) to the willingness to fight. The relationships between these leaders and the labourers are complicated, often spoken of in terms of *love*, and whether they “*adore*” each other as mentioned in the previous section. A defining characteristic of the *jupri* group is that most of them have grown up together from childhood at the bazar, separate from their families<sup>156</sup>. Most used to be petty thieves at one point, and moved together through the various NGO centres as they opened and closed with the donor funding cycles.

To be part of the *jupri* group you need to be a good fighter. As has already been indicated, some of the older members of the group (those aged around 28 upwards at the time of research) came through the ranks of previous gangsters such as *Picchi Hannan*. When they were out of earshot, the group would explain to me how notorious certain labourers I knew were, how they had been a powerful and dangerous *rongbaj* (criminal, gangster), carrying a pistol and shooting people. Being able to fight is a significant determiner of respect, and one measure I was judged by when becoming involved with the group<sup>157</sup>. Teenagers and young men growing up at Karwan Bazar and wishing to work within the group have to demonstrate their loyalty, their physical strength and “*daring*” (the English word is sometimes used) to older group members deliberating on their inclusion within the *jupri* group. Collectively, the group brag about fighting, about beating people up, about how scared they made someone, about how strong they are as individuals. These bragging rights are an essential part of the group's identity. They are renowned as the best fighters at the bazar I was often told. I was safe because I was with them, no-one would dare say anything. If they fight, then their enemies will run away to Bandarban<sup>158</sup>, as one member put it<sup>159</sup>.

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<sup>155</sup> Rubel was however far more involved in organising violence than this quote suggests, as will become clear in the next chapter.

<sup>156</sup> It is common for other groups of labourers at Karwan Bazar to be based on home district/village networks.

<sup>157</sup> I would constantly affirm how I could never fight because I wear glasses, while others would compare their biceps to mine, testing whether I could get out of grips or whether I could pick them up.

<sup>158</sup> Bandarban is a remote hilly district in the South-East of Bangladesh.

<sup>159</sup> As an example of the group's bravado, When watching an Awami League meeting at Karwan Bazar with Liton once he told me: *we're not the ones scared of them. Those leaders are scared of us. If anyone's going to be throwing bombs it's us!*

Beyond work and physical security, a critical role that labour leaders such as Rubel and Parvez play is running a *samiti*. *Samiti* is a Hindi-Bengali word for an association, a society, an organisation. In Bangladesh there are established *samiti* for all sorts of causes, from Buddhists to women, and looking back into history the *Anushilan samiti* was a famous anti-British revolutionary group. One primary function that *samiti* have in these contexts is for savings and credit, and in NGO language are varieties of a rotating savings and credit association (ROSCA) or accumulating savings and credit association (ASCA)<sup>160</sup>. From the perspective of the person running the *samiti*, often called the “*cashier*”, a primary purpose of the *samiti* to accumulate capital, which can be lent out at a profit or used for other investments. From the perspective of the user it is considered a convenient way of saving money, and a means of obtaining credit. At Karwan Bazar within the *jupri* group it was Parvez who ran the *samiti*. He would take 10 *taka* a day from 70 drivers. Nearby *sardar* were also identified as running *samiti*, and workers would always do the *samiti* of their *sardar* or *boro bhai*.

The *boro bhai* in the *jupri* group also play a key role in determining the political status and strategy of the group. Despite the Awami League being in power, the group – at the time of research – had explicitly affiliated themselves to the BNP. When I first met Rubel behind some parked buses, sitting on one of his rickshaw vans, he gave me a short speech on Islam, before provoking me asking *we are all BNP here. Do you have a problem with that?!* I later learnt this connection had come primarily from Parvez and Azad who affiliated the group with local BNP leaders in early 2014. The group’s affiliation was widely known at the bazar. When I asked Rubel about the significance of this affiliation for the group he asked me rhetorically - *will the small brothers support Awami League when their big brothers do BNP? No, if they do the big brothers will get angry and pressure them to do the same*. The younger members in the group often knew very little about these higher connections. I once asked Sayeed (a younger rickshaw van driver) who was above Parvez, he said: *I don’t know brother because we can’t ask him who’s above him. If I ask him he will beat me*.

Party affiliation is not about votes, none of the members can vote at or nearby Karwan Bazar. Underlying this affiliation was the calculation that the BNP would eventually get into power and that by demonstrating their support now they would be able to reap the rewards later. Political power could enable them to increase their control over work (in terms of contracts for unloading and distributing vegetables for example), as well as wider aspirations about leveraging this political power to control *line* and the *chanda* networks. In the period of BNP – Awami League conflict immediately

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<sup>160</sup> The difference then between ROSCA and ASCA is fundamental to academic categorisation of these groups, and the basic distinction lies in how savings and loans are distributed (Bouman 1995, Rutherford 2009). In the case of rotating groups, members of the group are each in turn distributed the money deposited. For all members except the last this represents a loan against future savings. The existence of a ROSCA is time bound according to the size of the group and regularity of deposits. By contrast, in the case of ASCA this capital accumulates, often serving as a pool from which members can take loans if needed. ASCA most often also have clear time horizon, perhaps one year, after which deposits are returned (Rutherford 2009). ASCA tend to have far more variables than ROSCAs and require more sophisticated forms of management (Ibid).

preceding and during my fieldwork, a younger *jupri* member Sayeed described to me how Parvez was paid around 30,000 *taka* per occasion to lead the *jupri* labourers into fights and skirmishes. But the *jupri* group's political affiliations are more complex than this description suggests. I once asked Liton about the significance of the group's BNP affiliation. He said

*Some men, like Rubel, Parvez, they only do BNP. They send people only to BNP. If they go to another, then they will ask "you do BNP, so why have you come to Awami League?" and then they will beat them.*

During the time I spent with the *jupri* group, it was relatively common for the group's labourers – though not Rubel, Parvez and Azad - to participate in political meetings. This happened most significantly during attempts by the BNP or *jamaat-e-islami* to call *hartal* (strikes) and meetings in opposition to the government. But rather than participating in BNP meetings, members of the *jupri* group (with the exception of Parvez, Rubel and Azad) would participate with wings of the *Awami League*. Liton explained their participation to me on one occasion:

*Sometimes we do krishok [farmers], sometimes jubo [youth], sometimes chattri [student]<sup>161</sup>, whoever comes and gives us money. Sometimes we'll even do BNP. It's no problem, we can go to whichever meeting because we haven't signed with any. We haven't got registration with any.*

The occasions I witnessed involved senior members of the local *Leagues* passing through Karwan Bazar rounding up the troops. On one occasion I recall the *Krishok League* secretary from nearby Tejgaon pass by the east side of WASA where a group from *jupri* were sitting. Walking along in his oversized suit and clipboard he was greeted by cheers from the group, he immediately gave 100 *taka* to the group for tea, and then said he needed twenty people for a meeting at Farmgate. Each person would receive 100 *taka*. I resisted calls from the group to come along, and the group left (after having tea) cheering the name of a local politician. On a number of occasions I asked the *jupri* group why they participated in political meetings and the answer most often came down to money – *they give us 200 taka to go, we can fill our stomachs, why wouldn't we go?!* Abdul put it once<sup>162</sup>. But alongside this economic incentive, sits more complicated reasons resonating with descriptions from the previous chapter, as Rubel explained:

*Those who are involved with the BNP, they go to the Awami meetings if they are invited. It's like a tangle (patch), it's complex for us. If today I am with Awami and I invite you to go to a meeting and you refuse, then I will inform the police and they will come to catch you. That's why we go. We have to go to save ourselves.*

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<sup>161</sup> All referring to *League* (*Awami League*) rather than *Dal* (BNP).

<sup>162</sup> Most often these political events were during the day. Because these labourers work at night there were not financial opportunity costs for attending.

Alongside the need to demonstrate a degree of support and adhere to the interests of Awami League politicians, the group's capability for violence also gave them a degree of protection from these actors. While other groups of labourers had to pay local *linemen chanda* when unloading vegetables, which was often 5 *taka* per sack, the *jupri* group were exempt. Liton put their status like this: *we're a big goonda. We have 70 members. We're good at fighting. They won't take chanda from us. If they try we will fight them.* As Mamun – a young labourer outside of the group – reflected similarly, *if the political people try and collect money from them, they will be beaten.*

From the perspective of the labourers, working in the *jupri* group therefore represents opportunities. It offers a structure within which people can earn a living, find support, protection, guidance, and a system for saving money in the form of a *samiti*. Working under the *boro bhai* provides a political status and opportunities, however these come with high risks attached. To work in the *jupri* group you are required to fight. As I overheard Rubel telling a *choto bhai* once, *either you will beat him or you will leave Karwan Bazar, now you choose.* You risk being beaten, arrested or even killed; you may risk the livelihood and respect of your family and community<sup>163</sup>.

#### 7.1.3. THIEVES, WASTE WORKERS, BEGGARS AND SEX WORKERS

At Karwan Bazar labour leader among the *kangali* can also be found in the case of sex workers and young thieves. Rimi is a sex workers' *sardari* who sleeps just to the south of the *jupri* lane, near to the Prothom Alo office. Her workers refer to her as *ma*, and she is perceived as *a very powerful woman*, as a local NGO worker described her. Women at a nearby centre describe her as connected to all sorts of local organisations and actors – the *truck drivers samiti*, the *bosti malik* (slum owner), the *bazar malik* (bazar owner). It is not only through her extensive knowledge of customers that she is able to establish herself, but through the connections that provide her with security. Female sex workers are highly vulnerable and therefore choose to operate under her not only to be linked with clients, but for protection. She *gives them shelter*, as a local woman described it to me, and in return takes a portion of their profit. More generally across Dhaka it is common for *dalal* (most often women) to seek out potential prostitutes living on the streets and connect them with customers, taking a portion of the payment.

As described in the introduction to this thesis, a similar labour structure can be found among the young vegetable thieves/scavengers. Many of the younger teenage boys who live at the bazar and in nearby NGO centres are thieves, mainly of vegetables, but

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<sup>163</sup> At the same time it should also be recognised that labourers sometimes move between *sardar*, rickshaw van owners and areas for example. Jibon once told me *if you don't go to the [political] meeting then the boro bhai will get angry. You won't be able to keep a good relationship with him.* I asked him what's the problem with that? He replied, *it's not always a problem because I can find another boro bhai, there are so many. But everyone needs a boro bhai, they won't rent you a van otherwise so you can't work here.*

sometimes of mobile phones<sup>164</sup>. Most of the *jupri* labourers I knew were themselves once thieves and this appears to be a common trajectory for young men who grew up at the bazar. Arif, who now works in a glass shop in the nearby rail line *bosti*, described moving to an NGO “club” at Karwan Bazar, realising that *all the children used to steal at night at Karwan Bazar*. The boundary here between thieves and scavenger is blurred, as many of the children and women not only pick up loose vegetables and chillies as they tumble from the trucks, but actively steal them. As Liton once put it to me: *thieves and tokai are the same*. For the most part people pay little attention and it is an accepted part of market life. Many previous and current scavengers/thieves described to me operating in small groups, led by a nearby *boro bhai*. They would all operate together for protection, keeping an eye out for police, shop owners, and vegetables that could be picked off. Sayeed described their tactics

*If you see a van going with a full sack of vegetables then we used to run behind it with a sharp blade, and then hold our bags behind it and the vegetables used to fall down until the bag was full.*

Working through the night they sell their goods in 10 *taka* portions on the side of the bazar, perhaps paying a local security guard 10 *taka* for the privilege. Others even used to supply people’s houses, always under cutting the market rate. A journalist who grew up near the bazar described to me the *churi sardar* (leader of thieves) of a previous generation called *Anda*, meaning egg, because he and those under him particularly stole eggs. He was described as a strong man and no-one could beat him in a fight, but he also had a *big heart*. *If he heard you hadn’t eaten, he would go down the road and steal a chicken for you. Then he would sell it and feed you rice... He couldn’t stand seeing people’s misery*. Labourers in the *jupri* group described having had a *boro bhai* when being a market thief. Some operated under the era of *Picchi Hannan*, and described their *boro bhai* who would protect them if they were caught and people wanted to beat them. *There was always an older brother giving us support*, Golap described him,

*He’s not here now. He used to stay in Begunbari. His name is Ibrahim Kholil. He used to do phensodyll business on Begun bari, Hatijheel... I used to have this boro bhai when I was a thief. If we were caught by anyone, by the police, then he used to come. If we didn’t work then the boro bhai used to give us some money, and when we earned money we paid him. If we earned 500 taka then we used to give 200 to him... He didn’t have any links with the political people.*

In secondary research sites labour leaders are also a prevalent and important intermediary on whom the *kangali* depend. A key figure at Osmani Uddyan park is Jewel, who is the *sardar* of waste (*moyla*) workers living there. These workers are

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<sup>164</sup> A teenage thief called Faysal who I met a couple of times apparently once held up a whole truck of sari and some of the teenagers including “all rounder” as he was known after the Bangladeshi cricketer Shakib Al-Hasan, is notorious for being the leader of a small group who steal mobile phones from CNGs.

employed on a contract basis by WASA and when there is work, each of his workers (of which there are around 30) give him 30 *taka* of the 300-380 *taka* they receive a day<sup>165</sup>. From their earnings, the labourers described it as common for them to deposit 100 *taka* daily in the *samiti*, which Jewel and his wife manage<sup>166</sup>. At and nearby Osmani Uddyan are various wings of the *Awami League*, most prominent of which are the *Jubo League*. The *moyla* workers described collectively having a *mutual agreement* with them, a *system*, where *there's no trouble, no fighting*. Key elements of this relationship are mutual support and *chanda*. Jewel and the labourers look to the *Jubo League* to settle problems. As the workers described to me, *if police come here and cause trouble, then they come and say "sir, don't harass them, these are good boys, they live from working", and so the police will leave us alone*. Jewel is critical in this process, though was quite coy with his descriptions of the relationship. Referring to the *Jubo League*, he said

*They are good with us. They shelter us. The boro bhai from nearby areas come when we call them for help. We are good with them, they come here and we give them ganja, sometimes give them water. These kinds of things. We have been here a long time.*

Despite Jewel's description of their relationship, it was reported to me that on one occasion last year the *Jubo League chamcha* beat him all night over a disagreement. Not only does Jewel maintain a relationship by supplying *ganja* to them, but he also provides payments. The workers described to me having to pay the *Jubo League* 10,000 *taka* a year from their *samiti* fund in order to stay at the park<sup>167</sup>. Lucky, a young woman who stays in a nearby NGO centre, told me *whenever there's work he has to pay them. He will have to give 300, 400, 500...*, though Anika thought the figure was more like 2000 *taka*, and that they come once a month. *Whatever amount they ask for, it has to be given*, she added. These local women who have lived in the park for decades described the consequences if he did not pay *chanda* to them: *They will beat (mar) and oppress (otachar) him. They will come at night and take him to a quiet lane and beat him with gazari sticks*<sup>168</sup>. The political *chamcha* also make demands on the *moyla* workers to do *bad things* as they described it, saying *"do this, or I will tell the boro bhai"*. Anika said that if they do not go to the political demonstrations

*They will be fined (joriman). They will say – you come here and do work in our place, now I have something I need done, I need 10 people to work, and I*

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<sup>165</sup> The total contracted rate for a labourer is 400 *taka* a day. Between the contractor (WASA) and Jewel, the WASA permanent staff called the "cleaner" allegedly take 50 *taka* from each labourer's rate.

<sup>166</sup> These *samiti* are ubiquitous. I was even told some of the tokai and chocolate selling kangali have *samiti*.

<sup>167</sup> I learnt from the labourers that another feature of this relationship is that they store the local *Jubo League*'s badminton equipment in the park for them and set it up when they want to play.

<sup>168</sup> A *gazari* tree is seen as particularly strong and its branches are commonly used as weapons, however *gazari* stick is also a common way of referring to any stick that people use as weapons.

*called you and you don't listen to me, so you will be beaten. I'm your boro bhai here.*

A final group from the secondary research sites who have a form of labour leader are the disabled beggars living on the pavement adjacent to the Bangladesh Supreme Court. These beggars are led by a *samiti* leader, an almost entirely paralysed beggar called Anwar<sup>169</sup>. Anwar is the *samiti* “cashier”, though he denied his role and even the existence of the *samiti* to me continuously over a couple of months<sup>170</sup>. Like many of the *lengra* (cripples) as they are known, he moves in a four wheeled cart which is pushed by a young boy with whom he shares his daily takings from begging. The Supreme Court has a history of beggar *samiti*, *shongoton* (association), or *group*, as I have heard them referred to. Previously, there was a *bastohara* (homeless) group, and a different group for the disabled beggars, run by Nur Islam and Nuzrul Islam, who were the “leader”, the “chairman”, also termed the *sardar*. Anwar described giving them ten *taka chanda* a day, while others spoke of giving roughly 25 per cent of a day's earnings. They used to distribute the donations given to the nearby *mazar*, and *if ever the police caused any trouble, or anyone else caused any trouble, we used to tell them and they solved the problem*, as Izaz, an elderly beggar told me. Majeda, a local NGO worker described meeting Nur Islam before he died

*I only met him a couple of times before he died, but I could see he was a good man. His behaviour was good. He was honest with people and had the capacity to manage them, that's why he was their sardar. Whatever money people would give him, then he would give them that money back to them at the end. I know he used to have a good situation – he had four or five rickshaws – he used to give out loans from the samiti money and take interest*

Unlike these *sardar*, Anwar does not distribute goods from the *mazar*. Nor do people give him a daily cut of their earnings - *why would I give the money I earn and need to pay for my child's school fees to a leader? Tell me that* was one response I got when

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<sup>169</sup> Political parties did not have a prominent presence in the context of the disabled beggars outside the Supreme Court. Local street businesses pay *chanda* to the police (the station police, traffic police and local unit of the police) and to local guards. Beggars did not describe having to give *chanda* to the police, however the relationship between Anwar and the police, guards or political parties remained unclear to me.

<sup>170</sup> Globally there is very little literature on savings groups among beggars. An intriguing and rare example comes from Mayhew's (2012 [1861]) account of 19th century beggars in London. Mayhew describes a 'society' called the 'Cadger's Club', the term cadger being roughly equivalent to scrounger. The Cadger Club was intended as a mutual self help society for beggars against arrest or sickness. Mayhew documented the account of a beggar: 'We paid 3d. ['d' is an abbreviation for a penny] a week each—no women were members—for thirteen weeks, and then shared what was in hand, and began for the next thirteen, receiving new members and transacting the usual business of a club. This has been discontinued these five years; the landlord cut away with the funds. We get up raffles, and help one another in the best way we can now. At one time we had forty-five members, besides the secretary, the conductor, and under-conductor. The rules were read over on meeting nights—every Wednesday evening.'

enquiring about this possibility. Another, from a young woman, was *if anyone tried to take money from me I would kick his arse!*

Unlike previous *sardar*, Anwar's activities are confined to running a *samiti* as a savings and credit group. Local people call it the *cripples samiti* (*lengra samiti*). Anwar is the President, while another beggar Delwar is the Secretary. Unlike the others *samiti* mentioned above, Anwar in fact gives interest of 5 per cent per year on the deposits members make, while he lends out at 10-20 per cent a month. As Taslim, who lives opposite the beggars, explained, the principle is that it is *10 taka per name. if you give 10 names you give 100 taka. You have to give everyday*. Every year they run an event (*onosthan*) where the group's members can collect their money and choose whether to re-deposit it. For each name they have they also get a portion of chicken *palao*<sup>171</sup>. The dynamics of a *samiti* and the activities of previous *sardar* are important to acknowledge, as there is very limited information about the social lives of beggars in Dhaka and more generally Bangladesh. There is some limited anecdotal and historical evidence to suggest a history of beggars in Bangladesh acting collectively and even violently. A journalist who knew these *sardar* personally recalled the strength of another beggar leader at the Supreme Court Arab Ali. Despite being drug addicted, he was powerful locally and when arrested in the early 2000s he mobilized 200 beggars to protest, which they apparently did by roaming the streets and biting policemen<sup>172</sup>.

## 7.2. INEQUALITIES AND INJUSTICES

Relationships between labour and leaders are often framed through familial labels, and spoken of as *boro bhai*, *uncle*, and *ma*. As highlighted, these figures not only provide access to work, security, political positioning or a *samiti*, but far more holistic support and guidance. Like family, they are seen in moral terms, judged to be good, to be fair, to be ethical, or otherwise. These labels then encapsulate the affection and dependency people have on them. They can provide sensitive support, life guidance, and protection like a family; and these dynamics to the relationships constitute part of the strength that these leaders have, and that the groups have. These relationships become all the more significant for people disconnected from their actual families. Part of this

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<sup>171</sup> An unanswered question also mentioned in the methodology regarding Anwar's *samiti* is how he enforces repayment. Given he himself is almost entirely paralysed this presents interesting questions.

<sup>172</sup> Little is known about how beggars mobilise. One significant exception is the '*fakir* movement', where *fakir* mobilised in opposition to the colonial state at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Lewis 2011: 51). A source from the Bangladeshi National Archives provides a further much smaller example, describing 'beggars' agitation in Barisal town': 'During the month of May, 1943 almost all the beggar women of Barisal town started looting bags of rice from the leaded carts, passing through the street. On one occasion they assembled near the Collectorate building and took forcible possession of some bags of rice from a cart. On receipt of message from the Additional District Magistrate, the police hastened to the spot and dispersed the beggars. They went so far with their agitation that they started looting sundry articles from the shops and open market in the town' (Superintendent of Police in Bakarganj, 1943a). Bakarganj is an Upazila in Barisal District. The letter goes on to describe the police patrols necessary to control the beggar looters.



solidarity comes from the fact that they are from the same ranks as the workers underneath them. Rubel and Parvez both grew up without parents at the bazar, they were *tokai*, thieves and labourers. Rimi was a sex worker. Jewel a sewage worker. Anwar was, and still is, a beggar.

And yet these leaders stand above their workers. Parvez and Rubel have done well, moved out from the bazar and established a family life. Jewel described to me his house elsewhere in Dhaka, and Anwar, though begging everyday, lives in a house towards Old Dhaka (in the south of the city) with his wife and family. Each however needs to come, and often sleep in these places, in order to maintain their connection with the workers and fulfil their role. Saleka, an NGO worker, explained why Rimi sleeps outside the *Prothom Alo* office

*This is her choice; if she stays on the street then she can keep good communication with people. Like the coolie, like the traders, like the truck drivers, like the high class people, government staff, police and administrative people, everyone knows her. The high-class executives from WASA have very good relations with her. She maintains a good relationship with all these people. But if she lives in a house then it wouldn't be possible, all these people won't visit her.*

While these labour leaders have a solidarity with their workers, those who they provide work to, or in the case of Anwar, those who deposit in his *samiti*, there is a significant gap in status. Even by middle-class standards, these labour leaders can be wealthy.

As an indication of Dulal *sardar's* relative status, he has three children all of whom have graduated to masters level and he also owns a local pharmacy in Farmgate which his son manages. To a lesser extent Rubel and Parvez were perceived as doing very well from managing the contracts, collecting *samiti* money, and taking money for fighting. As Sayeed explained of Parvez leading the group into fights, *he would collect the whole 30,000 taka and keep it all for himself*. Jewel spoke of his huge TV, arms outstretched, and the four rooms in his home. A journalist who interviewed the old beggar *sardar* in the early 2000s described them as being very wealthy. Nur Islam for example reportedly owned 30-40 rickshaws, a car, *kathas*<sup>173</sup> of land in *kamrangichar bosti* (to the South-west of Dhaka), and was even able to send his son abroad to be educated to Bachelors level. Looking at the *samiti* today, Anwar has been able to educate his family, some to university level, and sent a brother abroad to work. An NGO worker described intending to pay for the burial of Delwar's (the *cripples' samiti* secretary) wife when she suddenly died. She said:

*We thought he's our participant so we have to help bury her, but when we went there [to the funeral] we saw we were of no weight... I saw that all his relatives*

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<sup>173</sup> A *katha* is a common unit of land measurement in South Asia, and is 720 square feet.

*were coming on motorcycles. Then one of his relatives told me that Delwar owns a 5 storey high building in Jatrabari!*

There is also the sense among some workers that these leaders are exploitative, they are profiting at the expense of their workers, they are “cheater”. I heard this most often from people outside each of these groups, those who know them intimately but are looking inwards. A number of beggars around the Supreme Court who were not within Anwar’s *samiti* complained about the low rate of interest and the amount of profit Anwar was getting. As Izaz put it delicately

*It’s like bamboo in the arse! [goay bash] The guy who will manage the samiti, he will have all the profits, and he will give me only the bones [haddi] and sticks [dandy]. Say you establish a samiti and you have 50 members. If you can accumulate 50,000 taka then you can lend it to someone for profit [labe lagani], 10 percent per month. 120 percent per year. You are making 100 taka per thousand, per month so you have 5000 taka profit per month. So in 11 months how much profit would it be? And what would they give us?*

Rather than investing the money, they charge interest, identified as immoral, as usury (*shude lagai*). As well as the sense of injustice in the distribution of benefits, *samiti* are notorious for being set-up and then the *cashier* running away with the capital. I have met people living on the pavement who had invested thousands, even tens of thousands of *taka*, in *samiti*, only for it to be stolen. Another beggar described to me having done two *samiti* in the past, but all the money being *eaten*. I asked him who ate it and he responded: *a tiger!*

Similar sentiments are often expressed about relationships with the *sardar*. There is a common sense that labourers are not paid the real rate, that the *sardar* takes an unfair cut, being able to do so due to a labour surplus. Marium, the NGO cleaner we heard from previously, described to me having been part of a small team working for a woman selling towels next to Karwan Bazar, she said: *if you have capital... then you have strength (jor)*. If she was able to sell 10 towels then she would get 10 *taka*, be fed once, and have a shower paid for. But *she used to give me very little opportunity. She became rich, but I stayed poor. Me and the other girls used to curse her (bod doa – bad prayer)*. Commenting on Jewel’s payment to the *Jubo League*, Anika said

*The money Jewel gives doesn’t come from selling his ancestral land, Jewel makes work for 10 guys, and he takes money from them by ass fucking them... He takes 30 taka per person. Even if they get 200 taka, he will take 30 taka. If he can take this from only 10 people then it’s a huge amount.*

It is these kinds of sentiments that I encountered strongly at Karwan Bazar. Despite the rhetoric of the *jupri* group not being under Dulal *sardar*, they had a much more intimate relationship to him than they would have liked. The sense among the *jupri* labourers is that the *sardar* are “cheater”. Liton described arriving in Karwan Bazar and finding work under a *sardar* - *I didn’t understand the system here and so went*

with a *sardar* [Dulal]. But as soon as I understood, that's when I left! The *jupri* group continued to have grievance against Dulal *sardar* however. At its most basic, the dispute concerned control over work. Within the *jupri* group they felt they had too many men for too few trucks, and looked enviously at Dulal's supply the other side of *jupri goli*. They had previously worked under Dulal, *he taught us everything*, Liton told me<sup>174</sup>. Not only did he have a greater supply for his men, but he was also making advances into their territory. He was trying to take *chanda*, as one driver put it, trying to take a rent for the space, thereby taking a cut of their earnings. During one of my first encounters with Parvez he had told me, *the sardar are thieves... if they try and stop us we will beat them*.

### 7.3. CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that a key way in which the *kangali* are included into the social order is through the intermediation of labour leaders. Labour leaders take diverse forms but are often referred to as *sardar*, and in the research contexts studied can be found among labourers, sex workers, thieves and beggars. Labour leaders play complex roles in the lives of those who work under them, providing access to work, security, savings systems, advice and support, and also a status in relation to the wider social order. Some groups of labourers such as the *jupri* group function as factions, in conflict with other groups for work and seeking opportunities and status in relation to the ruling coalition. Such groups have a clear capability for direct violence, and are utilised by local wings and associated bodies of political parties on this basis. The ability to fight is a key quality for labourers in such groups. In the urban context groups of labour can represent the lowest form of faction within or in opposition to a ruling coalition, a fact not acknowledged by literature to date. The status of a leader within groups of labour, and the status of the group in relation to the ruling coalition, are not static, but evolve and are negotiated. The following chapter substantiates these arguments and deepen insight into the role of labour leaders in the social order, through examining a dominant way in which the *kangali* negotiate their status and access to resources. We return to the case of the *jupri* group.

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<sup>174</sup> It is important to realise that I am just picking up the story of these struggles and alliances mid-story. It appears that previously the *jupri* group had been directly under Dulal *sardar*, and the process by which wanted to they break away from his control was a long one, of which events described in the next chapter were just a small part.

## 8. DEMONSTRATING A CAPABILITY FOR VIOLENCE

*Do you know what Bangladeshi politics is? It's capture, beat, cut, slash, rip,  
escape!*<sup>175</sup>

Salam, a *jupri* labourer at Karwan Bazar

This thesis has built on the argument that social order in Bangladesh, like much of the world, is based on a coalition of actors maintaining a superior capability for violence over rivals (North et al 2009). This coalition is formed from actors at different hierarchical levels of society who use their capability for violence to extract resources from society enabling them to maintain their status (Khan 2010a). A key conceptual step taken in this thesis is to connect this understanding of social order to the lives of the poor through the notion of intermediation, and thereby explore empirically how the organisation of violence affects the *kangali*. Following the understanding of social order described above, it was posited that a means by which a ruling coalition obtains the resources they need to maintain their status is through mediating the access that others have to resources. This suggests a relationship between intermediation and a capability for violence. Previous chapters have argued that social order from the perspective of the *kangali* reflects this. These chapters have illustrated what this social order looks like, with arguments concerning the decline of *mastan* gangs, the significance of party political actors, the roles of labour leaders as a key intermediary connecting the *kangali* to party political factions, and the complex interdependencies that these relationships represent.

An important question that has not so far been addressed but emerges from this framework, is how the *kangali* negotiate their status within the urban social order. Put another way, if the *kangali* face a range of intermediaries who control access to resources, then a critical question becomes how they become intermediaries, or as intermediaries, how they increase their control over resources. Indeed, historically there was a close connection between the *kangali* and *mastan* gangs, as there was also between the *rootless people* and *goonda* in Kolkata (Ghosh 1991); and the previous chapter also argued that labour leaders most often come from the same background as the workers they manage, suggesting that the *kangali* can move up hierarchically within the social order. The answer to these questions that emerges from the fieldwork and aligns with the framework developed, is that becoming an intermediary is premised on demonstrating a sufficient capability for violence. Establishing this capability is essential because the nature of intermediation is tied to how social order is maintained. Intermediation is a means by which a ruling coalition accrues resources, and attempts to gain greater control over resources in such contexts have to contend with the likelihood that actors within the ruling coalition either directly control or are

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<sup>175</sup> *dhoru, maro, kato, tchero, fero, bereo jao!*

in someway profiting from how those resources are currently distributed. Disrupting existing intermediary arrangements means altering the balance of power within and in relation to this coalition.

This chapter explores how establishing a superior capability for violence to rivals requires both having this capability and also demonstrating it. Previous chapters have explored how this capability is associated with the ability to directly use force, as well as the ability to call on others who can use force. The cases explored in this chapter build on these understandings by illustrating how a capability for violence is constituted by a number of characteristics coalescing and mutually reinforcing each other. Together these give insight into what Khan (2010b) defined as ‘holding power’, the ability to engage and survive in conflict. Cases show how in the context of a faction, the ability to mobilise members towards violence, and call on more senior support, are both constituted by, and contingent on, a number of further factors including one’s position in relation to the ruling coalition, the control of capital and material incentives, and the bonds that can exist within complex interdependencies. Having capital and the ability to distribute benefits are essential in a faction, however more complex interdependencies are constituted by the personality of a leader, the support, the love, the confidence and trust that can exist in longer-term relationships. Cases suggest that a weakness in any of these areas can undermine a capability for violence, for example an inability to control and distribute resources, a question mark over one’s character or an ill thought out allegiance.

This chapter also explores a capability for violence is a characteristic which – to serve its purpose - must also be demonstrated. Indeed, successfully waging violence serves to indicate to others that it is you who has a rightful place to control the resources fought over (Khan 2010b). Writing in the context of India, Berenschot (2011: 269) similarly argues that the ‘violence of a goonda is a performative act’ designed to instill a sense of authority in the wider community, and thereby show one’s legitimacy for wider roles such as settling disputes or running extortion rackets. To help to understand this argument it is useful to return to the distinction introduced in chapter two, regarding Lukes’ three dimensions of power. Of particular importance is the distinction between Lukes’ first dimension – the power to force someone to do something; and the third dimension – the power to control people’s references. Framed in terms of violence this first dimension can mean the capability to directly coerce people through force, while in the third dimension it refers to how a capability for violence enables one to influence what others perceive to be or not to be possible without necessarily using violence. Viewed in this way, the logic of demonstrating a capability for violence is to be able to develop power in the third sense. When sufficiently demonstrated, acts of violence instill in others a sense of one’s capability for violence, thereby influencing how others perceive the legitimate role of that actor within the context and society. The intention of demonstrating this violence is then not to be required to use it, as others perceive the costs or challenging it as too great; and

hence a greater capability for violence is associated with a lower need to use it (Tilly 2003; Khan 2010a).

This chapter develops this argument and explores some of the complexity in how a capability for violence is constituted and demonstrated. The empirical narrative of this chapter continues the story of the *jupri* group, and surrounds events in late 2014 and early 2015 when they attempted to take territory from Dulal *sardar*, and mobilised in support of the BNP. This took place within a climate in which opposition to the Awami League was being violently confronted, significantly affecting the outcome for the group. Emerging within this story are the unsuccessful manoeuvrings of Liton to form a new faction to challenge Dulal *sardar*, as well as Parvez, Rubel and Azad<sup>176</sup>. These events further reinforce many of the arguments developed in preceding chapters regarding the connection between intermediation, violence, party politics and labour leaders; and constitute part of what was conceptualised in chapter two as the ‘politics of intermediation’.

### 8.1. FIGHTING THE RULING COALITION

Violence is fundamental to how the *jupri* group pursue opportunities at Karwan Bazar. Rubel, Parvez and labourers within the group often framed the possibilities for improving their status in terms of *a need to fight*, whether it was in relation to the group gaining control over more contracts for goods coming to the bazar, or how people become *linemen* or political leaders<sup>177</sup>. I was often told, half jokingly: *you’re with us, so you will also have to fight!* The events explored in this half of the chapter suggest that establishing a superior capability for violence to rivals is fundamental to how the *kangali* become intermediaries and improve their status, be it as a labour leader or party political actor. The events illustrate the interdependency between different characteristics, which contribute to a capability for violence, in particular the relative strength of capital and labour, and most critically, the significance of one’s position in relation to the ruling coalition.

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<sup>176</sup> It is important to acknowledge that these forms of mobilisation are high risk, and the majority of the *kangali* are not sufficiently organised or motivated to attempt such strategies. Groups of women are not, in my experience at least, organised in ways resembling these, and many such men do not work as organised labour. Given that the people studied – labourers in a bazar – are similar to much broader groups of the urban poor, it is likely that the dynamics described here have broader applicability, and indeed experiences in Karwan Bazar suggest that this is the case.

<sup>177</sup> I cannot of course prove that alternative routes to gaining status and becoming more powerful intermediaries at the bazar were not possible, but only that they were not apparent from events observed, nor from how the group conceptualised such processes. Furthermore, the relationship between other forms of labour leaders – for example the disabled beggar Anwar who runs a *samiti* – and a capability for violence is less clear.

8.1.1. JUPRI VS. THE SARDAR (PLUS THE POLICE AND THE CHATTRO LEAGUE)

*Bengalis are bad. If you give them a chance they will take everything, that's what  
we're like  
Dulal sardar*

Through immersing myself in the world of the *jupri* group I had heard all sorts of grievances against Dulal *sardar* – he was blocking their work, he was trying to take *chanda*, he was taking a cut of their earnings, *he grabs the rights of the poor (goribder hoq maira kai)*<sup>178</sup>. When the group discussed Dulal and what to do about him, violence was at the forefront of their solutions. Prior to events described here, Rakib once asked me rhetorically, *will we really allow people to block our work? We're the ones who work for our rice. We can't sit silently. Shouldn't I fight for my own money?* Liton would often explain how to the group *had to fight* to resolve the problem<sup>179</sup>. For over twenty years Dulal *sardar* had controlled the contract to unload the carrot trucks coming to Karwan Bazar, but towards the end of 2014 the *jupri* group's disaffection with him was mobilised into action.

Though I had picked up on the increased intensity of these private remonstrations against Dulal *sardar*, I was nonetheless surprised when I arrived at Karwan Bazar on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2014, and was immediately told of events the previous night. The anti-*sardar* sentiments that had been building for months manifested into what was portrayed as an anti-*sardar* strike. By 9pm the previous night around seventy of the *jupri* group had blockaded the main entrance to the vegetable wholesale market, demanding that Dulal *sardar* be got rid of – feelings such as *if we don't get the work, no-one will!* and *it is either us or the sardar!* were expressed to me. Blockading the bazar was an assertion of the *jupri* group's identity, a 'contentious performance' (Tilly and Tarrow 2007)<sup>180</sup>. Not allowing the flow of goods even for a couple of hours could have serious financial consequences at the market. The group knew, Liton and others explained, that the market authorities and the wholesalers would either have to give in or fight them off, a potentially dangerous move with a group so large. In line with Khan's notion of 'holding power' (Khan 2010b), the purpose of a strike was to demonstrate the potential costs that the group could impose on others using their capability for violence.

Although I never discovered Dulal's own agreement with the Awami League, his labourers paid the *Jubo League* five *taka* for each bag of vegetables they unloaded into the bazar, whereas the *jupri* group did not pay anything. Challenging a *sardar* who has been established for over twenty years therefore disrupts the balance of power at Karwan Bazar and directly affects more senior figures in changing their power base.

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<sup>178</sup> People call him the fake police (boa police) behind his back, and this is a way of questioning his authority.

<sup>179</sup> Though Liton advocated action against Dulal and participated in the strike, he left the group before the fighting, as will be discussed in more detail in section 8.2.

<sup>180</sup> 'Contentious performances' are 'relatively familiar and standardized ways in which one set of political actors makes claims on some other set of political actors' (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 11).

In line with this, local *Awami League* leaders from Tejgaon got involved, and there was reportedly even the intervention from the area's MP. Despite the group's BNP connections, the strike was ostensibly successful. Negotiations with the Awami League leaders led to Dulal leaving the bazar, fearing being beaten up, and it allowed the *jupri* group – led by Parvez and Rubel – to take over his contracts<sup>181</sup>. Rather than having access to only a few of the trucks in their lane, they took over all of them. Nazir explained

*The carrots used to be controlled by Dulal sardar, it was under their system. But now we have brought them into our system. They unloaded them for 20 years! We didn't say anything, they didn't allow us to work them. Now we have become united, we are 150 drivers and have pressurised them. We have taken control. Now we work by sharing them*<sup>182</sup>.

Unlike Dulal, so the word went at the time, Rubel and Parvez would not take the cut that Dulal was taking, and therefore the van drivers would benefit more greatly and equally. Though he was not identified by most as having become a *sardar*, Rubel played a similar structural role. I remember seeing his men monitor and record the arrival of goods, and him take responsibility for paying not only van drivers, but also the *coolie*. As a young labourer Sayeed later described it, *Rubel took the sardari (sardari neyechilo)*. Over the coming days a series of further meetings took place involving *purano lok* (old people)<sup>183</sup> from the group who had moved on, and also local politicians including Tejgaon *Awami League* leader *Maula Bhai*<sup>184</sup>. There seemed to be an agreement that Dulal could keep the ownership of his 12 vans, and thereby still earn his 1200 *taka* rent a day, but would lose control over the contracts, thereby losing his cut, and his status. Dulal *sardar* became simply Dulal. The *jupri* group included many (but not all) of his men, recognising that *they also have families and need to earn*, as Liton put it.

Tension however remained. A few days later when hanging out at Karwan Bazar, the group were subdued and reluctant to talk. Liton told me *there might be a big fight. Someone might even get killed... It's not safe to talk about these things... Let's talk about something else*. Less than a week later it became apparent that Dulal, the elderly and experienced *sardar* of decades, was not to be stopped so easily. Around 7 or 8pm on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December I got an innocuous seeming call from Liton, asking whether I was coming to the bazar that evening. Something about the tone of the conversation

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<sup>181</sup> Retrospectively people's descriptions of Rubel's interests differed slightly. Salman's interpretation of Rubel's interests for example were – *Rubel wants to split the work with the sardar, for 6 months he will take the orders, then the other 6 months the sardar will take them*.

<sup>182</sup> As this passage indicates, Dulal's labourers joined Rubel, Parvez and Azad's group rather than attempting to fight them off.

<sup>183</sup> The reference to old people from the group implied people who had previously been within the *jupri* group but that had moved on to more senior positions elsewhere.

<sup>184</sup> Though I was invited by the *jupri* group to attend these meetings with local Awami League members, I chose not to go as I felt my presence could have complicated the situation at the bazar and compromised my position, potentially posing problems for my safety in the future.



struck me as odd and arriving the next morning, a week after the strike, I found only a few of the *jupri* group. Shumon approached me with his usual smile but winced as I shook his hand; it was swollen and cut. The night before (the 21<sup>st</sup> of December) Dulal sardar had hired the *Chattro League* to come and fight off the *jupri* group, enabling him to retake control. Dulal's inability to mobilise the labourers under his command did not mean that he could not demonstrate a capability for violence, which he did so through directly paying people within the ruling party to fight for him. Salam described the event to me:

*We completely beat them up. Dulal sardar paid students from the universities and colleges, they came at us at around 9pm in front of the bank. It lasted for two hours. When one of them hit Parvez that's when we all went crazy and fucked them up. Azad brought his guys and smashed a hook into one guy's head. He's a chamcha. He's in Dhaka Medical and will take six months to recover. They were taught the lesson of their lifetime*

Despite winning the fight, *jupri* were defeated however when the *Chattro League* called in the police, forcing the group to flee. The group scattered and the *Chattro League* subsequently took control of the *jupri* lane, posting men in the area to make sure they did not return. When I saw a few other member of the *jupri* group at the bazar they spoke to me in whispers, looking over my shoulder at the *Chattro League* men. Salam was optimistic however - *we will get rid of this motherfucker... He has lots of money but we have lots of people, so we will see how long he can continue with his money*. Pumped up by the thought of the fight Salam told me they had 500 men, exaggerating, and that if anyone gets near him he will take out his *machine* (gun) and *bang bang*, though I was quite certain he did not have a gun.

I returned the next morning (the 23<sup>rd</sup>) and at first could not find any of the *jupri* group at all. As I was leaving I bumped into Abul, a slightly older member of the group, who took me to the opposite side of the bazar, up a small staircase where there was a remote tea stall and no-one around. Rubel was there with a few of the group looking downcast. Offering me tea and a cigarette, he explained the situation:

*After we took the work Dulal offered us 3.5 lakh to give it back, but we didn't agree. He acted over us, spread a rumour and arranged the fighting. Because we didn't take their money, they brought the "killer"<sup>185</sup>. They had 70 people. They brought the boys from Chattro League and paid them 2 lakh to fight, though they offered us 3.5 lakh. Our mistake was that we didn't accept the money.*

*But what can you do now?* I asked. *I know one person at a higher level*, replied Rubel, *but it won't work. Taka taka taka*, Dulal chipped in. The *Chattro League* had not only called in the police to push off the *jupri* group, but Dulal sardar had a further strategy to play: he launched police cases (*mumla*) against key *jupri* members at Tejgaon police

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<sup>185</sup> "Killer" is a common way of referring to hired muscle, and refers to the *Chattro League* here.

station. As Rubel put it – *he made a charge sheet against us that we pressured him and took away the goods from him* (a seemingly quite accurate picture of what happened, regardless of their grievances). The point of primary contention had been the unloading of the carrot trucks. Dulal *sardar* launched a case against the three *boro bhai*, Rubel, Parvez and Azad and eight others.<sup>186</sup> This forced them into semi-hiding. They became *fugitives* (*ferari*) as Rubel put it. How can you resolve this I repeated? *With money it can be solved... David Bhai, you don't know anyone who can help do you?... I know no-one like this, I am just a student*, was my formulaic but honest response. Before I left I heard them plan their next move. Rubel instructed: *we will attack them again after azan. So we need to buy some "monkey tupee" (balaclava)*.

Returning a few days later after celebrating Christmas, I found Rubel back outside WASA sitting on one of his rickshaw vans behind the parked buses. He had evidently found a way to resolve the situation, at least for himself, and brushed off my question about how he had managed it. He explained that two of those with cases against them were in prison (including Azad), while the rest had got bail (*jamin*). Though released they remained *fugitives*. *Why?* I asked. *Because they used to do BNP. Their party doesn't have any power now. Parvez does BNP as well*. Rubel explained. An undertone to these events, but one not made explicit during them to me, were the group's BNP connections. I noticed how Rubel began to soften his portrayal of his political affiliation. At the post fight tea stall he had been adamant in telling me that *we aren't BNP, we aren't Awami, we are workers (sramik)*. On this occasion he told me that *I'm both BNP and Awami. I do both, it depends on the situation. They are the same*<sup>187</sup>.

One of the group's younger van drivers, Salman explained that *the BNP's people came to fight against the sardar, they showed their power (komota)*. Azad (the "fireman") was most closely associated with being a BNP person and having a capability for violence, and it was he who almost killed a member of the *Chattro League* by smashing a hook<sup>188</sup> into his head. It was difficult to verify an interpretation of why these events unfolded the way they did (given the sensitivity of the topic and me being unable to return to Dhaka to follow up further six months on), however a likely interpretation is that what began as a conflict over work became a political conflict. When Rubel and Parvez refused to accept Dulal's offer of 3.5 *lakh taka* to return the work, Dulal was forced to try and call on an actor who could violently challenge the *jupri* group, enabling him to demonstrate a superior capability for violence and re-establish dominance. These "killer" were the *Chattro League*<sup>189</sup>, though as it turned out they lost in their fight to the *jupri* group. Before and during the fight, the *jupri*

<sup>186</sup> Rubel also mentioned that there were two cases launched – one from Dulal *sardar* regarding carrots, and another regarding the cabbages of a nearby vegetable wholesaler Ratul.

<sup>187</sup> He went on to say, *both are ladies and ladies have something less than men*.

<sup>188</sup> The long metal stick with a sharp hook at the end that coolie use for picking up bags.

<sup>189</sup> Though I attempted to find out, I never understood why he chose to call on the *Chattro League* in particular. It is worth noting that the *Chattro League* did not have a big presence within the market itself, though were present north of the bazar at Tejgaon, and perhaps it was too complicated to call on a wing of the *Awami League* from within the bazar.

group were calling on all of the people they knew to help them, and given their close connection with the BNP, BNP members came to fight. The fight was now explicitly political at a time when any support for the BNP was being violently confronted by the police, RAB and the Awami League. This perhaps bolstered the forcefulness of the police in subsequently pursuing cases against key members within the group. Though helping them win the fight, the BNP connections were a liability for the group, particularly for Parvez and also for Azad, who was still in jail (and stayed in jail for the remainder of my research).

Meanwhile Dulal managed to maintain his status through payments. As Liton explained: *Dulal sardar doesn't have a good situation but he still has lots of money – so he can pay his people to come and protect him.* Others told me that if Dulal sardar did not continue to pay the Awami League he would have to flee the market. In terms of work, the situation returned to how it was prior to the strike, resting on an uneasy peace. Dulal reclaimed his trucks, but was too cautious to return back to the bazar, managing everything through his men. Rubel and the *jupri* retained theirs, and Parvez continued running his *samiti*, turning up infrequently at the bazar, but only staying a short while and mostly coming during the daytime. Life seemed to settle down, only for it to become far more serious for Parvez and Rubel.

#### 8.1.2. SUPPORTING THE OPPOSITION

*All the *jupri* group support BNP because the current Prime Minister received an award from the UN that she alleviated poverty from this country, but there is a huge amount of poor people. She told lies and received that award. Sheikh Hasina has a bad character – what she says, she doesn't do. But she is very educated. This government isn't able to provide security. She's especially not able to protect the poor people. Now the poor people are going to the police station and giving their complaints but there's no justice for them. The rich people are capturing the poor people's children. Nowadays we see that one kilo of rice is 50 taka, so how can people who have big families survive? The richest people in society are keeping the poor people under pressure, and that's why the poor people don't like the Awami League... This is a country of democracy, it's not a country of kings. When a king dies his son comes to power. It's not like this here. It shouldn't be like those kings, so we should vote, but she's not giving us this opportunity. She's actually illegal but presenting herself as legal.*

Rubel, *jupri boro bhai*

Late 2014 and early 2015, the period during which the conflict described above took place, was highly unsettled in Bangladesh. Khaleda Zia was put under effective house arrest (though in her office) and the BNP's attempts to organise blockades (*operad*) and strikes (*hartal*) had very limited success. A few years previously calling a *hartal* had meant a serious threat of violence, in effect shutting down most areas of the city. By this period however the city was almost as busy as normal on *hartal* days, and the

ability of the opposition to mobilise labour on the streets was widely recognised as diminished. As a result, the opposition appeared to resort to more desperate and extreme measures to demonstrate their capability for violence and publically question the ability of the ruling Awami League to maintain order. Between January 5<sup>th</sup> and February 24<sup>th</sup> there were approximately 119 deaths due to political violence in the country (Bergman 2015), including ruling party and opposition activists, as well as many civilians targeted in cocktail blasts in public spaces and petrol bombs on buses. Understanding the role of the *jupri* group during this period illuminates a different means by which the group attempted to improve their status through violence. It also illustrates the street level dynamics of political violence (Atkinson-Sheppard 2015; BRAC 2016) and deepens our understanding of the relationship between organised labour and party politics.

At the end of December I had expressed fear to Rubel about continuing to come down to Karwan Bazar. The 5<sup>th</sup> of January had been lined up as a showdown, the one-year anniversary of the 2014 general elections, which the BNP had boycotted and the Awami League had therefore won by a landslide. Rubel agreed, *there could be problems. It will be everywhere. There will be fighting, shooting, bombs, stabbings. So maybe I shouldn't come down?* I suggested. He responded

*There won't be any problems because you're friends with the boys who would be doing it. And the main thing is that their target is the Awami League. In the fighting people can see from your face that you are a foreigner. But if someone gets inside the fight then what can be done? Otherwise we know you well, you can come no problem.*

My suspicions about their involvement had been sparked by his comments, but others in the group seemed to express genuine fear about the spate of mysterious cocktail blasts and fires at Karwan Bazar over the next month or so. These targeted buses, police and the underpass beneath Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue. On at least one occasion they made national news (The Daily Star, 2015b). The report describes 'miscreants' throwing 'at least two crude bombs' at a bus in the north of the bazar, hurting the driver. By this time I had expanded my research sites southwards, and only visited Karwan Bazar a couple of times a week. In early February the intensity of buses and CNGs targeted, as well as the occasional sound of cocktail bombs going off at my new research location by Dhaka University, persuaded me to lay low and write for a couple of weeks, as well as spend time at the National Archives.

I returned to Karwan Bazar on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February to find the fates of Parvez and Rubel had changed quite radically. Around the 10<sup>th</sup> of February Parvez was – so the *jupri* group allege – suddenly taken by RAB. Akash, who saw the incident, described the *former* Sajid walking along with RAB who were dressed in *white clothes* (civil clothes). Pointing out Parvez, they allegedly grabbed him, and took him down to near WASA where – according to others – they tied him to Shumon's rickshaw van and crushed or smashed his hands and feet before arresting him. The night before I arrived

(the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February), RAB had reportedly returned around 7:30pm taking Rubel, and he was at that point in Dhaka Central Jail. Akash, who rents one of Rubel's vans, interpreted it like this: *people say that those with beards are working for Shibir*<sup>190</sup>, *they placed a case against him as a suspect of Shibir*.

The charges – which all the labourers in the *jupri* group agreed were true – were that they had been *doing BNP politics*, orchestrating the local bombings. They had been paying the younger children associated with the *jupri* group<sup>191</sup> (and often the nearby NGO centres) to torch buses, start fires and throw molotov cocktails. Mamun was angry that his younger brother had also been arrested, pointed out by Sajid, and charged with vandalising a car under BNP instructions. Golap described how they had forced the younger children associated with the group

*They [Rubel, Parvez, Azad] make them throw bombs. They put pressure on them. Like today I've come here to the centre, and if they ask me to clean the floor then I will do it, because otherwise I won't be able to come here tomorrow. So, it's like this. It's mandatory.*

Some saw these arrests as a continuation of their conflict with the *sardar*, though Liton was adamant that this was entirely separate. In his own words

*This time it is a political problem, but that time it wasn't political. That time he was taken by the police and charged. But this time he was captured by the RAB. And you know RAB only capture those who do big crimes*<sup>192</sup>. *If there is a case placed then the police come to get you. But RAB come with the law section 54 that they just have doubt. They take with 54 then beat them and get information*<sup>193</sup>.

Liton's adamantness that the previous conflict was not a *political* (*raznatik*) problem is interesting given the clear involvement of the *Chattro League*, the BNP, and Rubel's explanation of how problematic the BNP ties were at that stage. What it seemed to me he was indicating is that although that conflict involved political actors it concerned territory for work, whereas the political violence here was at the behest of the BNP and focused on establishing the dominance of the BNP as a political force and coalition. His analysis was that Parvez had been beaten and given information and that RAB had a long list of people they would take one by one. Rubel would be beaten, then another would be taken, and so on. A number of the group reflected that Rubel

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<sup>190</sup> Bangladesh *Chattro Shibir* is the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, the Islamic party currently in coalition with the BNP.

<sup>191</sup> Some of these children were the younger siblings of labourers within the *jupri* group, others were scavengers and thieves at the market who associated with the *jupri* group. As mentioned in chapter five, the *jupri* group are a common entry point for young *kangali* children seeking work or affiliation, due to the shared background, with most of the group having grown up at the bazar.

<sup>192</sup> Liton was not here saying that RAB catch all of those who commit big crimes, but rather contrasting the nature of the crimes that they do address compared to the police.

<sup>193</sup> Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure gives the authorities the right to arrest someone under suspicion of a crime.

would get out, but would have to pay huge amounts of money. *Maybe when he gets out Rubel will kill the former*, Nijam reflected. By this time Parvez had been released on bail, having paid 50,000 taka<sup>194</sup>, his hands and feet were fractured, and though he could walk, he could not work. He was staying with family in Tongi (in Gazipur, north of Dhaka), and visited the bazar occasionally by day, though his *samiti* had broken up and he therefore no longer received the daily 700 taka. As we walked slightly away from the bazar towards *Tejgaon* station, Liton told me that Parvez himself had now become a *former*. They had beaten him and convinced him, saying he would get paid. *He's really proud now. He thinks he's a big person again, saying that he's now a RAB person. He still has the BNP links, but they are quiet now.*

When reflecting on events with younger rickshaw van drivers who were either within the *jupri* group, or who work nearby under different *sardar*, I tried to steer conversations round to the tricky subject of Rubel and Parvez. By this point they had both been taken by RAB, Parvez was out and Rubel in Dhaka Central Jail. I asked Mamun and Salman about why – given all these problems – they did BNP politics. Mamun replied straight faced and bluntly

*Love. As you love your Labour Party<sup>195</sup>, they love their party... If you like Awami League then of course you will support them and never BNP. If you support BNP you will not like Awami League.*

The sense that they were motivated by *love*, or conviction, is also indicated in the passionate speech Rubel had given me quoted at the beginning of this section. Salman reflected differently on their involvement however, saying *they get different opportunities from different political parties*. Mamun continued on this line of thought

*You know what the latest system is? It is to think about opportunities, then you just do the party which has power then you will get the opportunities. They are opportunists [shubida badi]. I'm also an opportunist.*

Liton had a similar analysis of their involvement: *they do BNP because they think when they get into power they will become very rich men*. The motivations for Rubel, Parvez and Azad to mobilise the *jupri* group behind the BNP are difficult to discern, partly because of a lack of data, but also because different motivations were expressed to me. Rubel's passionate speech in favour of the BNP sat alongside him purposefully distancing himself from them when needed, or disregarding any difference between them and the Awami League, and labourers within the group described the relationship in terms of opportunities. What seems more clear is that it is unlikely the children who they involved in the bombings were motivated by ideological factors, but were – as

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<sup>194</sup> It was unclear from who this was paid to, however. Some said it was to a lawyer while others said it was to RAB.

<sup>195</sup> I had been interrogated elsewhere about my political affiliations in the UK, and the word had evidently spread. Both English words, Labour and Party, have strong resonance in Bangla, and people had interpreted it as a positive sign about my potential involvement with the *jupri* group.

Golap's quote implies – at least in part forced to be involved under the threat of violence.

Examining both cases of violent mobilisation – the conflict between the *jupri* group and Dulal *sardar*, and the *jupri* group's orchestration of bombings on behalf of the BNP – suggests different ways in which demonstrating a capability for violence can be a route to gaining status. It may, as in the conflict with Dulal *sardar*, be through a direct demonstration of strength, where a group publically show they have superior violence capabilities than those currently in power; but it may also be through attempting to demonstrate the weakness of others, as in the case of orchestrating bombings on behalf of the BNP. In the latter case, the logic was not to directly confront the Awami League on the streets, but to demonstrate to wider society that the Awami League could not contain the opposition to them, and create an atmosphere of unrest in which new possibilities could emerge<sup>196</sup>. In both instances, the *jupri* group (and more specifically, leaders in the *jupri* group) perceived that demonstrating a capability for violence would present new opportunities, but in the first instance it was through directly taking new opportunities, and in the second, it was a speculation, a risky calculation that the opposition could gain power and they would be rewarded for their support. For months one particular member of the *jupri* group Liton had been highly critical of their alignment to the BNP, not for any ideological reasons, but because he saw it as a futile political calculation. Indeed, he had very different plans and ideas for the group, as is explored in the second half of this chapter.

## 8.2. THE POLITICS OF SAVINGS

This half of the chapter continues the case of the *jupri* group, further exploring how people attempt to improve their status through establishing and demonstrating a capability for violence. These sections tell the story of how one member within the *jupri* group attempted to form a faction, challenge the group's existing leadership and pursue opportunities through the Awami League. The means by which he began this endeavour offers insight into the politics of savings groups; how forming a *samiti* can be a violent statement of intent and the seed for a party political faction. This argument reinforces many of the arguments developed in previous chapters, particularly the link between intermediation and violence, and the significance of labour leaders at the lowest levels of the ruling coalition.

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<sup>196</sup> It is important to note that at this time there was speculation that the Awami League themselves were orchestrating some bombings in order to discredit the opposition. This was a sentiment I also encountered among the *kangali*, although not at Karwan Bazar.

### 8.2.1. BECOMING A *BORO BHAI*

*For these twenty boys I've given four years of my life. I taught these boys honestly.  
With these twenty boys I will fight! If you want you can join us...*

Liton, speaking to me, January 2015

Coming from the struggle with the *sardar* and failed attempts to increase their control of work (though prior to the arrests of Rubel and Parvez), a further struggle for power emerged. One of the senior members of the *jupri* group Liton, a *boro bhai* (in terms of age but not in terms of structure) was unhappy. Liton had fallen from a middle class life around four years previously through a process he always kept guarded – it was either bad luck, connected to the fact his wife had died, or *politics*, said as if the word itself provides sufficient explanation. Despite living at the bazar and driving a rickshaw van under *jupri*, his education and contacts set him apart from others. He had a reasonable command of basic English and described having “*mental problems*”, which he explained meant he would get angry and depressed. He has a scar running from one side of his mouth towards his ear and was probably in his mid 40s, his hair and stubble greying. He would not tell me his age and always promised to tell me about his political background fully, but never did.

As tension had built with the *sardar* he had broken away from the *jupri* group, finding work delivering goods around Dhaka, and then later finding another van owner who he could rent from opposite Ershad building, to the north of the bazar. To do so he had had to learn how to ride a rickshaw van with a chain and pedals. He had become a “*single man*” as others put it<sup>197</sup>, despite remaining within the group socially and to sleep. This work earned him the equivalent if not more than those at *jupri*, and meant he had not been involved in the fighting with the *Chattro League*, though he had been very active in the initial strike. It also meant independence, a freedom, an ability to survive without being paid by Rubel. He was explicit about this, he explained to me how he had seen the trouble coming, knew it was stupid for Rubel and Parvez to have associated themselves so closely with BNP, and that it would end badly for them. Moving away from the *jupri* was (at least in his plans) his first strategic step to becoming a *boro bhai*. As he later explained it,

*Rubel and Parvez have been working on the BNP's side. They've been vandalising, torching, throwing bombs.... that's why I gave up being with them because I knew I would be blamed and captured like them. If I stayed with them RAB would also capture me. But I understood a long time ago so I slowly left them... and I'm fine now*

He held strong grievances against both Parvez and Rubel: *I am so angry with Rubel and Parvez. I hate them. They said they would develop everyone but they just*

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<sup>197</sup> “*Single*” refers to the type of van he was driving designed for long distance, as opposed to the vans with two layers of support to carry heavier loads.



*developed themselves and their families*, he once told me, echoing feelings often expressed about other labour leaders, as seen in the previous chapter. Upon getting access to the new trucks in December following the strike, Rubel, rather than allowing anyone within the *jupri* group to unload them, allocated these to a select group of around twenty drivers. Cutting through the discourse of “*jupri* against the *sardar*”, Liton was very critical that though they had got rid of one *sardar*, they had not replaced him with a new *system*, but simply someone who would act as a new *sardar*, though called something else. Put otherwise, the grievance then was that they had claimed to want to change the rules of the game, but once in control had done nothing of the sort. During the small period where the *jupri* group appeared to have successfully taken over from Dulal *sardar*, Liton described the situation as such

*Most of the group are happy because they think we have got rid of the sardar, but we didn't, we just changed him, but they don't know that. Previously the sardar was collecting the money and distributing, and now he's [Rubel] doing the same but with more authority. Now you can't even ask or question him. He says this is your share and you have to take it. He already used to have an area, so now he has two areas... he has senior political connections at Karwan Bazar, he has the links and so when the protest was going on he supported us. Now he has more political power.*

His claim then was that Rubel – like the *sardar* – was taking, or going to take, an unfair cut from the fee given to the group for transporting the goods, as well as mediating access to work within the group unfairly. With his authority extended he had greater power over the *jupri* van drivers. But Rubel wasn't just being unjust, he had a bad character

*Rubel is no good. He has his beard to show people he is pious but actually he isn't. Inside he is evil. Do you know how he is? Just one year ago he used to sleep on the top of the water tank at WASA with a prostitute. How could he manage to sleep at night with a prostitute like this? He has his wife, son and daughter*

His grievance also extended to Parvez, particularly because of his *samiti* - *he's dangerous, he is a trouble for everyone, he's not thinking in the right way, not for the development of everyone. He just thinks about himself*. In practice Liton claimed that Parvez had been taking the 700 *taka* a day collected from the *samiti*, and sitting down most of the time, not bothering to drive his van. He had taken a total of around 70,000 *taka* of their money, *gone home and eaten well*. Similarly, Rubel had apparently also previously run a *samiti* and he had only given back a small portion of the amount people had deposited. The primary grievance is then that Parvez and Rubel have been given a responsibility, a power, a role, by the group, which they had misused.

Liton considered himself above the others, older, more experienced politically, and better educated. Parvez was however established in the area and he had trusted him.

*How could I have become a leader four years ago? No-one knew me, no-one could trust me. Parvez and Rubel have grown up here, they know everyone. But Parvez has only been doing politics for six months, I've been doing it since birth, is he really that senior to me? Rubel treats me like he's my senior. He sometimes orders me around. But I'm his senior, that's why I'm doing this.* Parvez had aligned the group with *bad people* – by which he meant the BNP - prominent among whom was Azad who had led the fighting with the *chattro league*. These contacts were now make obstacles for their work rather than making it easier, and *if anyone says anything to them they will get stabbed or shot.*

Faced with this situation, Liton had a vision for what he wanted to achieve, one that either impressed others, provoked ridicule or anger. He wanted to build a new group, a faction, still within *jupri*, but taking thirty of the labourer to contest the power of the *sardar*, Rubel and Parvez. His steps to achieve this would be first, to start a new *samiti*; second, to register with the *krishok league*, and third, to contest again the role of Dulal *sardar*. Finally, being a *samiti for life* as he described it, it would eventually become a “*limited company*”, buy land and have their own office with a *karam* board and TV<sup>198</sup>. Members would also have their own “*visiting card*”. Later on this “*limited company*” was framed as an *NGO*, suggesting I could be the “*chairman*”. People can be impressed by his knowledge. He helps people fill in forms and chat to women on the Facebook app on mobiles. They carry assumptions and ideas, stories and rumours about what the outside world can offer them (such as loans, tenders), and they see the benefits of extortion rackets and bribes. The importance here is not whether any of this happened (it had not by the time I left Bangladesh), but rather the logic by which he envisioned extending his power.

Using Shumon, his most trusted friend, he began signing people up for the *samiti* in early January 2015, carrying a small notebook to record transactions and keeping the funds in Shumon's locked wooden box next to WASA building. Rather than having a *samiti* where people gave money and eventually it would be shared later, he wanted to create a *fund* that would be *for life*, as he described it. People therefore deposited daily (30 *taka* day, or more if they could give it), and from the collective fund it was planned that people would eventually be able to borrow (rather than be given) money, without paying interest. Within the next two or three months he thought he could help between two and five of the members. Within one year he would have one or two *lakh taka*. *What can people do with it?* I asked. *With this money you can buy your own van, you can buy goods in the evening and sell them in the morning, give me back the capital and walk away with the profits.* People can change their clothes, change how they are perceived. People can borrow without interest. *Do you see my idea?* He asked me once.

The purpose of the *samiti* was that it bound people together around interdependencies weighted in favour of Liton. It creates real material opportunities which people could

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<sup>198</sup> Liton discussed these plans with me in depth for a couple of weeks before actively starting the *samiti*.

take advantage of and therefore a solid base on which Liton as their leader, the *samiti cashier*, can lead them and provide for them. Selling the *samiti* to a potential member Mamun, he invoked his contacts

*I know the metropolitan Jubo league chairperson, Nikil bhai, Siddique the organisational secretary, they are my friends. He has lots of power. He does north city politics. He manages the whole north side of the city and I'm with him. Do you know what this means? If he makes a call to Ahmed [Tejgaon Awami League leader] or anyone else here so that people don't put a place a case at the police station, or even if he calls the police station – even if they have committed murder – it's no problem for him. Don't you understand? Their party is ruling now. So if the police don't listen to him who will they listen to? They are my friends from my childhood, I can call them and there won't be a problem any time.*

The difference then is between Parvez's BNP links and his Awami ones. Parvez's links have become a liability for the group, while signing with the Awami League provides security and opportunities. It is interesting to note that, in one of the few glimpses I got into Liton's past, he had claimed to be a BNP *Hawkers Dal* leader elsewhere, but insisted that in Karwan Bazar it did not matter because he did not have a BNP “signpost”<sup>199</sup>. What will your relationship with the *Krishok League* be like? I asked. Liton replied: *I won't need to give them money, they will give me money. If I take money then they will use me. Nothing else is required – they need manpower and we have people.* With this group then Liton imagined having his *bodyguard*, evoking the images of previous *godfather*. He would keep five people around him at all times, register with the *Krishok league* and then challenge the *sardar* in the way Rubel failed.

*First I will register then I will fight Dulal sardar. Maybe I will take an AK47. I will solve the situation. He has money, he has many goonda, mastan, he can make all of them come. No problem we can also call many mastan, we have many mastan. He is senior so he has had his turn but now we want to do it...*<sup>200</sup>

This is of course a risk. But, as Liton said, *I have to take a big risk, because I need to get married again. I have to take care of my son, so won't I take the risk now?* Liton had come to the point where he felt confident enough that he knew people, knew how things worked, that he had built up sufficient respect as a potential leader to take the risk. And at the same time he also felt he had wasted so many years, he was getting older, the work was getting physically harder and he needed to move on with his life, and become something more. People however questioned and even ridiculed him. The

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<sup>199</sup> From snippets into his past gathered in the year I knew him he also described having been an interior decorator, having worked in technology, and having had to provide a large gang with twenty thousand taka worth of phensedyl everyday. He also showed me what he claimed were the scars from having been shot nearby Karwan Bazar many years previously.

<sup>200</sup> The term *mastan* is used here in the same way as *goonda* or “killer” to indicate a for hire fighter. Liton previously spoke of the *jupri* group itself as a *goonda*.

key issue was trust. From the perspective of the *choto bhai* they wanted to know whether Liton could be trusted with their loyalty, their labour. Shumon (half jokingly) called him their *guru* while others outside the *samiti* called him the *educated crazy man* (*shikhito pagol*). They described him as sometimes doing things that *can't be said*. People question his family situation and ability to care – *he doesn't go to see his son often, does he really care for him?* a young potential recruit to the *samiti* asked me<sup>201</sup>. They question his ability to show respect, love (*bhalobasha*) and “adore” his *choto bhai*. Salam explained his perspective on Liton's *samiti*:

*If he doesn't give importance to the people who will make him leader then how will he become a leader one day? If you take 10 people and want to become a leader but don't "adore" them, then how will you become a leader? Will people love you? He has 30 people. He wants to take 20 people to do politics and manage the area with 10 people. He wants to be a big person, do politics, keep a pistol with him and get a big name.*

Liton's ambitions were then to control the contracts under Dulal like a labour leader, however also control a side of the bazar as a political leader. But, *he lays his hand on us* [hits, slaps], *gets angry, how can we make him our leader?* Rakib asked me rhetorically. People do not trust him with their money, they fear that he will run away once the *samiti* is large enough. Not everyone was therefore won over. Salam reflected on Liton's *samiti*

*It's bad, in Bangladesh no-one believes anyone, a brother doesn't believe a brother, so how can I trust him to give him my money? If I gave him my money now when the situation of the bazar is so unstable, what will happen to it?*

Liton's *samiti* was a very public demonstration to the wider group of who he wanted to be at the bazar, and his actions directly challenged Parvez and Rubel's leadership during a fractitious period in which they were also under threat from the police. To side with Liton was clearly to side against Rubel and Parvez. The labourers most solidly under Rubel (who rented his vans for example) were not part of his *samiti*. Some, like Salam, made fun of him too much for him to be his leader, publically voicing a disrespect for his aspiration and claim to be a potential leader. Tension built. *We need to throw Liton out*, Rakib told me once. As Shakib, another van driver, put it – *I will make Liton leave this place, this guy isn't good, he wants to become a leader but won't be able to. I will throw him out. I will throw everyone who is educated out.*

By the time I left Dhaka in April 2015, Liton's *samiti* had collapsed. People did not trust him enough for it to work, some reflected, and members had received their deposits back. Shumon, his once trusted friend and follower, had aligned himself with a low level political leader who was *using him*, as Liton put it. He described Shumon as not thinking in the right way, as being stupid. Liton was renting a van from a young

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<sup>201</sup> Liton would react angrily to people's suggestion that he did care for his family sufficiently, because he knew – so it seemed to me – that it compromised the viability of his attempt to be a leader.

guy who owned five or so of them opposite Ershad building. He seemed to be integrating himself with that group, though I could see he was frustrated being ordered around by someone a good couple of decades younger than him. I had planned to return six months later, but Dhaka's political situation declined sufficiently for me to be warned off. Liton had remained hopeful before I left however, *maybe when you come back I will be a leader. You will see.*

#### 8.2.2. SAVINGS, VIOLENCE AND MOBILISATION

This section reflects further on the significance of a *samiti* in Liton's plans, in relation to wider literature from Bangladesh. *Samiti* feature in academic research from Bangladesh primarily through the study of NGOs and microfinance institutions (MFIs). Early in Bangladesh's history, NGOs formed *samiti* as a way of organising the rural poor into class based solidarity groups (Devine 1999), forming part of a rights based and political approach to development (Lewis 2017). *Samiti* were important structures within high profile NGOs such as *Proshika*, *Samata* (Devine 2006), and continue to be so in rare cases such as *Nijera Kori* (Kabeer 2003). With the growth of microfinance in Bangladesh, and the movement of NGOs through the 1990s towards service delivery models of development (Lewis 2017), *samiti* within MFIs became essentially a means of organising clients to facilitate financial transaction, by reducing transaction costs and better ensuring loan repayments<sup>202</sup>. While the model of social mobilisation may have largely died out in Bangladesh, elsewhere the significance of savings groups for social mobilisation has received significant attention within development practice and academia (Appadurai 2002; Archer 2012; d'Cruz and Mudimu 2012; d'Cruz 2014). Under the umbrella of the Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) network, for example, savings groups have been promoted as a means by which groups of relatively powerless people can mobilise together to promote their collective interests. A founding example of this is the *Mahila Milan* ('women together') association, a group of pavement dwellers in Mumbai mobilised on the basis of regular and collective savings to advocate for the right to settlement and access to services. For this group saving money has been a key 'tool for mobilization' (Appadurai 2002: 33), and this model has been applied across the world. The change enabled by such groups has been framed in terms of claiming rights, and gaining better access to government services (Appadurai 2002; Archer 2012; d'Cruz and Mudimu 2012; d'Cruz 2014).

Savings groups outside the context of NGOs and Microfinance Institutions are rarely studied in Bangladesh, despite being extremely common (Rutherford 1997; Khan 2000; Al Asad Bin Hoque and Baqui Khalily 2002). As Khan (2000: 80) wrote from his research in a Dhaka *bosti* 'it was almost impossible to find anyone who was not involved with a ROSCA'; and yet very little research has been conducted on their prevalence, forms and dynamics (Al Asad Bin Hoque and Baqui Khalily 2002).

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<sup>202</sup> This point reflects the assessment of a key informant who was previously head of microfinance for one of the country's largest NGOs.

Savings groups have been most systematically examined in Rutherford's (1997) work on 'informal financial services in Dhaka's slums'. Rutherford found variations of informal *samiti* operating between neighbours in slums or lower class neighbourhoods, and among occupational groups such as garments workers and rickshaw drivers. Elsewhere, he also refers to the presence of saving groups among staff within MFIs (Rutherford 2009). In chapter seven it was argued that in the lives of the *kangali*, *samiti* are typically organised through labour leaders, and this was the case for market labourers, drain workers and beggars. Historical work on labour leaders discussed in chapter three suggests that group savings may be a long established feature of these relationships (Bates and Carter 2016). The presence of *samiti* within occupational groups in Bangladesh has also been noted historically (McGregor 1989)<sup>203</sup>.

The case of Liton's attempts to organise labourers at Karwan Bazar suggests seeing *samiti* as – in certain contexts – serving as vehicles for mobilisation, however embodying different values to those usually acknowledged within development. This argument resonates with the role *samiti* played within the NGO *Samata* (Devine 1999, 2002, 2006). Devine's (Ibid) ethnography of *Samata* in rural Bangladesh demonstrates how the ends to which these *samiti* can be mobilised can be highly confrontational and violent, and the principles through which these are mobilised, and resources distributed, clientelistic. The role of *samiti* in the lives of the *kangali*, and particularly the case of Liton, suggest that *samiti* must be understood in relation to the role of labour leaders in the context of a social order where intermediation is dominated by actors within the ruling coalition on the basis of their capability for violence. Viewed in this way, *samiti* can be conceptualised as a means by which potential leaders demonstrate a capability for violence, and thereby attempt to advance their claim to control of resources.

Within the model of competitive clientelism, factions at different levels of society compete for inclusion within the ruling coalition through demonstrating their superior capability for violence to rivals. In the lives of the *kangali* it has been argued labour leaders are a critical way in which political factions can form, mobilising the labourers under party political banners to gain greater control over resources. Viewed from the perspective of a labour leader, status is contingent on, among other factors, being of political value to those above you, while ensuring that labourers are incentivised to remain with you. Establishing a *samiti* can enable a potential leader to achieve both of these aims. As seen in the case of Liton, a *samiti* solidified a group of people around him who were committed to his political vision, and incentivised their loyalty through the longer-term prospects of the group as well as immediate benefits such as money for business ventures. Rosen (2010: 3) writes of building authority

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<sup>203</sup> Though in the example cited by McGregor (1989) the *samiti* had roots in the cooperative structures introduced by the British in the early 20th century, suggesting multiple origins for the *samiti* we see in Bangladesh today.

Figures of authority, then, must build up their constellations of indebtedness in order for people to begin to attribute to them the qualities of someone who will share benefits with his dependents and not (in the local idiom) “eat” everything himself.

While at first Liton was required to promote his *samiti* to others, describing his vision and the benefits they would receive, the longer-term outcome from his perspective was that the web of interdependencies created would solidify his position as the group’s leader. As Liton attempted to build this role for himself he also began acting like a leader, appearing strong, wise and reliable. This sense of role-playing is examined further in the next chapter but is an extremely important part of this process. Liton began openly carrying a notebook, which he kept in the breast pocket of his shirt and in which he detailed who was in the group, the deposits made and the total *samiti* fund. This symbolic indicator of status was particularly impressive for those of the group who could not read and write. Similarly he would open his wallet<sup>204</sup> to demonstrate the “*visiting card*” of local politicians, as if proving his connections to establish the veracity of the claims he made<sup>205</sup>.

The symbolism of forming this *samiti* was very clear at Karwan Bazar, and represented a threat to the existing leadership of the *jupri* group, and the place of Dulal. Liton would sell the *samiti* to potential members invoking his political contacts to demonstrate his capability to offer opportunities and protect the group, however at the same time the *samiti* was fundamental to the value he could offer to his political contacts. As described, he framed this relationship simply in terms of giving the support of his group to a political leader in exchange for money. From the perspective of others the presence of a strong and functioning *samiti* with Liton at the head was a declaration of intentions. In a similar way to the performative violence of a *goonda* (Berenschot 2011), the creation of a *samiti* is a performance, and serves as a threat to rivals. Understood in relation to Lukes’ faces of power, it symbolizes power in the first dimension, an ability to coerce others, but also makes movements towards the third, opening up possibilities about the agenda for change possible at the bazar. It demonstrates to others that he Liton, was the clear leader of 30 men who were bound to him, have a capability for violence, and are committed to his leadership. Viewed from the perspective of members within Liton’s *samiti*, a commitment to save money with him was a commitment to an inherently violent vision of what they could achieve.

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<sup>204</sup> Even having a wallet indicated his seniority over others who would carry rolled up bundles of money in their *lungi* or pockets.

<sup>205</sup> More generally it is very common for low-level or aspiring leaders to keep small piles of slightly frayed cards in their wallets. These are proudly brought out and paraded and then delicately replaced as one would a valuable document in a safe. I found street corner party affiliated leaders with not only local political leaders cards, but even MPs and ministers. Whether they had been directly given them, passed them from above or somehow traded for them, I do not know.

For this reason, depositing money within Liton's *samiti* by labourers can therefore be seen as a symbolically violent act<sup>206</sup>.

### 8.3. CONCLUSION

This chapter has asked how the *kangali* attempt to improve their status and become intermediaries. It has argued that a fundamental means by which this occurs is through demonstrating a superior capability for violence than rivals. The events explored in the lives of the *jupri* group illustrate some of the complex ways in which this capability is constituted, and how it is demonstrated. Events suggest that because intermediation is intertwined with how a ruling coalition accrues resources, and therefore how social order is maintained, such conflict inherently involves the ruling coalition. Even where one has a superior direct capability for violence to rivals, if one is not appropriately situated in relation to the ruling coalition, attempts to become an intermediary can be high risk in that rivals can more easily draw upon the strength of the ruling party and apparatus of the state. People also demonstrate a capability for violence in diverse ways. Most obviously it can mean fights, strikes or bombings, but more subtly it can mean building allegiance and interdependencies through, for example, a savings group, or by showing the contacts one can draw upon. All of the events described illuminate how fragile a capability for violence is. A powerful labour leader one moment can be publically beaten the next, a budding leader starting a *samiti* can be undermined by rumours or question marks over character. The account offered here should be seen as offering only a glimpse into how the *kangali* demonstrate a capability for violence, and in practice its dynamics are far more complex than what has been documented here. Furthermore, as the following chapter argues, even if violence is fundamental to how the *kangali* improve their status within the social order, people have diverse interests, which they pursue in a variety of ways beyond violence.

## 9. THE TOOLS AND STRATEGIES OF THE WEAK

*Negotiation... a power of weakness*  
Rosen (1984: 182)

This thesis has explored the ways in which the *kangali* have complex dependencies on intermediaries, or in others words, how they 'live in the shade of others'. It was argued

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<sup>206</sup> This understanding of *samiti* has some resonance with examples of much larger samiti in Dhaka's history. In the early 20th century the 'Dacca Anushilan Samity' had the purpose of 'bringing about a revolution by force of arms and depriving the King of the sovereignty of British India' according to the prosecution team against the samiti's ring leader and followers (High Court of Bengal, Calcutta 1912). The case describes the samiti's involvement in murder and dacoity, noting that the commitment of members to the samiti were formalised in a vow, and regulations were learnt by heart. Furthermore, the group agreed to follow the principle that 'money obtained is to be the common property of the members' (Ibid: 4). This reference to common property may have been organised as savings, suggesting that the connection between savings, samiti and violence, may have deep historical roots.



in chapters six and seven that a term of these relationships is often the necessity for the *kangali* – particularly men - to participate politically, and this can be violent. In the previous chapter it was further argued that a fundamental means by which the *kangali* negotiate their status within the social order and become intermediaries, is through demonstrating a capability for violence. This capability is of such importance because social order itself rests on a dispersed capability for violence, and access to resources is often controlled on this basis. This chapter provides an important counterweight to these arguments. It argues that despite the significance of the phenomenon described, in fact the majority of the *kangali* do not pursue their livelihoods and interests through violence. Rather, they negotiate around the violence capabilities of others, seeking and creating opportunities through more surreptitious and common strategies and tactics. The focus of this chapter is therefore how people negotiate the urban environment in ways that enable them to avoid or negotiate the obligations and risks associated with intermediation.

The first half of this chapter examines the limitations to the control that actors within the ruling coalition at the lowest levels of urban society has on resources. It is argued that a prevalent way in which people improve their livelihoods in the contexts studied, is through exploiting resources that are not controlled by others by virtue of being considered defiled. This includes living in the open, collecting recyclable goods and begging. Cities such as Dhaka have the potential for what are conceptualised here as ‘defiled surpluses’, resources that can be productively exploited but at the cost of an association with the defiled (Jackman 2016)<sup>207</sup>. The second half of this chapter examines dynamics to how people negotiate the urban environment in ways that support the defiled surpluses proposition, but also apply more widely. Role-playing, lying and maintaining weak ties are explored as examples of non-violent ways in which the *kangali* navigate life, pursuing their livelihoods and interests<sup>208</sup>. In line with chapter two, rather than ‘weapons’ (Scott 1985) these are conceptualised as ‘tools’. The key argument developed is that the *kangali* should be conceptualised as dynamic actors actively crafting their futures through the means they have at their disposal.

## 9.1. EXPLOITING ‘DEFILED SURPLUSES’

*It's better to have small fishes everyday than one big fish for one day*  
Neymar, a *moyla* worker at Osmani Uddyan park

### 9.1.1. ‘DEFILED SURPLUSES’

It is well established that for the urban poor in Bangladesh, access to resources such as housing, services, employment and the right to do business, are closely mediated

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<sup>207</sup> Arguments developed in the first half of this chapter has been published in Jackman (2016).

<sup>208</sup> It should be made clear that the latter examples given – role-playing, lying and creatively maintaining weak ties – can all of course be applied to anyone and not just the ‘weak’, as seen in the case of Liton for example. The argument however is that for people who cannot demonstrate their capability for violence, or appeal to people who can, these tools take on an even greater significance, hence the focus given to them here.

by third parties (Khan 2000; Wood 2003; Banks 2008, Hackenbroch 2013; Banks 2016). Previous chapters have explored how access to employment, opportunities, the right to do business and security are often controlled on this basis in the lives of the *kangali*. Using the LAO framework this thesis has framed the ways in which such access is mediated in relation to the need to control organised violence (North et al 2009). Preceding chapters have examined in detail how intermediation and violence intertwine within the lives of the *kangali*. In particular, the right to do business and work in value chains such as those that manage waste or supply vegetables have been argued to be intimately connected to the ruling coalition that weaves its way down to the lowest levels of urban life through the wings and associated bodies of the Awami League. People require and utilise relationships with political leaders to seek opportunities, and these political leaders look to the *kangali* as a source of revenue for their factions, and as labour for violence. The experiences of the *jupri* group at Karwan Bazar illustrate the complex nature of these relationships, and the obligations, opportunities and risks they entail.

Alongside these relationships it is also important to understand where the ruling coalition's grasp on resources is not so firm, and the implications this has for the livelihoods of the *kangali*. Critical to understanding this in the contexts examined is the proposition that resources that are considered socially 'defiled' are less exploited by those with the power to do so. The term defiled is used here to indicate that which is considered dirty or impure, physically and also symbolically. In contrast to many groups of urban poor – particularly those living in Dhaka's large *bosti* – it is often more difficult and less profitable to extract economic benefits from the *kangali*. Part of the reason why this is the case is that unlike in large *bosti*, there are not collectively provided services in places such as pavements, parks and to a lesser extent bazars and transport terminals. Dhaka's large *bosti*, as elsewhere in Bangladesh and across the world, are densely populated and people are reliant on basic services such as gas, electricity, water and sanitation that are provided by a limited number of actors. Mediating access to these very often represents a source of income and leverage for those in the ruling coalition. For the most part, this is not possible in the lives of the *kangali* as there are no such services<sup>209</sup>. Rather, in these contexts people make do as they can through piecemeal solutions and using nearby services controlled by a shopkeeper or landlord. They cook on the street between pavement cracks, use private toilet/shower for a small fee, charge their phones in local shops and use NGO services.

Also unlike the large *bosti*, it is relatively uncommon for people living in the open or in *potho-bosti* to have to pay to live in these spaces. Though people more often than not live regularly in the same space, because they have a greater degree of mobility, it is far more difficult to leverage living in the open as a source of regular income. This is not however to say that it does not happen – I encountered, for example, infrequent examples of people living in these spaces being forced to make small payments under threat of locally powerful political *chamcha*. As noted in chapter six, at Karwan Bazar

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<sup>209</sup> An exception to this are NGO run toilets and health services operated across the city.

Ansar began charging people on the veranda to the south of the bazar 10 *taka* a night to sleep there, and during DCC evictions, it is common for police to extort people for the right to return back to their patch of pavement. In terms of payment size and regularity, these are however nowhere near the magnitude of Dhaka's large *bosti*.

Similarly, access to work in sectors where labour and supply of work is not organised, is far less closely mediated by the ruling coalition. There is therefore a broad contrast between the *kangali* who work in sectors where labour is organised (examples include market labourers, drain workers and sex workers) with forms of work, which are less organised. Two very common examples of this latter form in the research contexts were scavenging and begging. In the vast majority of cases scavengers operating in public spaces do not have to pay anyone for the right to collect waste bottles, paper or other materials. Similarly, in the contexts studied beggars do not need to pay a beggar leader, political leader or the police for the right and ability to beg. I did however encounter exceptions to this, particularly outside of my research sites. In certain neighbourhoods (particularly wealth ones such as Gulshan and Banani) some of the popular spots for begging are controlled by small groups who exclude others. The connection organised beggars and the *sardar* of a previous generation outside the Supreme Court was also discussed in chapter seven. In the case of scavenging some child scavengers live together in recyclable goods shops (*bhangari doka*), and have close – and often exploitative – relationships to the owners. By and large however access to these forms of work are not mediated in the same way as that focused on in this thesis.

Collectively, the elements pointed to here – the ability to sleep in the open or in *potho-bosti*, the ability to beg and the ability to scavenge – can be conceptualised as 'defiled surpluses'. This is the idea that cities have the potential for creating surplus resources that are socially constructed as "defiled", but that can be productively exploited. The idea of a surplus – as in excess, or resources beyond what are needed – comes from the fact that third parties do not control or utilise them. The majority of poor urban people do not actively exploit these defiled surpluses. A shop worker paying to live in a large *bosti* may be able to save money and invest elsewhere, for example, but is not necessarily exploiting any defiled surpluses. But drawing on this surplus represents the dominant way in which people living in the very worst conditions benefit in the urban context.

In Dhaka, scavengers survive through collecting waste paper, bottles and vegetables, which they then sell on, as people do across the world. Sicular (1991) writes of scavengers as "those who treat waste essentially as an ore: a source from which valuable materials can be extracted". The basic principle behind this is the productive appropriation of something that has been conceptualized as both dirty and not needed. Similarly, the act of begging itself can be seen as an appropriation of a defiled surplus, but in a different form. It is taking on a subservient, socially demeaning status, in order to extract surplus wealth from other urban dwellers. Most significant of all is the appropriation of unused space in a productive way. In Dhaka this includes footpaths,

parks, sides of rail lines, nooks and crannies within markets and between buildings, *mazar* (shrine) grounds, stadium car parks and transport terminal floors. These spaces are often concrete, solid, sometimes sheltered, in some ways comparatively clean physically, and yet considered defiled and in much of the 24- hour cycle unused. Together these spaces, materials and statuses are all perceived as defiled and as impure, and yet together can represent surplus resources that can be exploited.

That scavenging and begging can in instances be profitable, or that living in the open can be a means of reducing costs, has been observed across the world, indicating that defiled surpluses are not unique to any particular context. Sicular's (1991: 144) study of scavengers in Indonesia records how for the uneducated and unconnected, certain forms of scavenging could offer higher incomes than working in agriculture or garment factories, "often high enough to allow them to save small amounts to remit to their villages". Recent research from Ghana has found that scavengers in Accra "earn far better than the daily minimum wage" (Rockson et al 2013: 152). Similarly, scavengers in Nuevo Laredo, a city in the north-east of Mexico, have been found to "make in one day what minimum-wage factors workers/employees make in 1 week" (Medina 2005: 391). As will be established, evidence here suggests that some scavengers can even earn more than low-level professionals.

There is no reason to suggest that the possibility for defiled surpluses is uniquely urban; however, characteristics particular to the urban environment give reason to believe that defiled surpluses are more probable in these contexts. The possibility for defiled surpluses is, most importantly, contingent on significant inequality. As Sicular (1991) argues, scavenging is dependent on high levels of consumption producing recyclable waste. Similarly, the opportunity for begging is dependent on there being surplus wealth, and the appropriation of open spaces is also reliant on high levels of public investment in infrastructure (pavements for example). There is greater potential for all of these in areas with concentrations of wealth. Given that urban areas across the world – and certainly in Bangladesh – are often wealthier than rural ones, this leads to the conclusion that defiled surpluses are more likely in urban centres. Indeed, historically, scavenging for example has concentrated in urban centres, though it is not unique to them (Downs and Medina 2000). There is also some historical evidence that suggests a long-standing potential for defiled surpluses. Mayhew (2012: 528) describes with some surprise the high income of sewer scavengers in 19th-century London. These scavengers were known as "shore-men", "shore workers" or "tosher", the last name coming from the items, or "tosh", that they found. They would illegally enter the city's labyrinth of sewers, searching for lost and washed- away goods, usually working in small groups to protect themselves from swarms of rats. Mayhew also notes the high incomes of particularly entrepreneurial beggars in the city.

Though emphasizing the potential for defiled surpluses, it is clear that not all urban contexts offer such opportunities, and that not everyone experiences these opportunities equally. Thus, research elsewhere has documented that, contrary to arguments here, these occupations offer low incomes (Tevera 1994; Wilson et al 2006)

that are only enough for subsistence (Birkbeck 1978; Huysman 1994). A recent study from India, for example, argues more generally that those living in poor- quality settlements “merely survive” (Krishna et al 2014). The authors argue that “the kinds of settlements that currently serve as home in Bangalore to new migrants from distressed villages hardly serve as locations for building a better life” (Ibid: 583). Similarly, studies of people living in the open have elsewhere noted high inequalities in people’s incomes (Jagannathan 1988). Critically, therefore, defiled surpluses should be understood as resources only when there is the convergence of different factors, including particular structural socioeconomic and political conditions, as well as certain personal characteristics. An extremely wide range of factors can be pointed to as significant, including economic factors (for example, relating to the price of recyclable goods, or the availability of surplus wealth to be distributed in alms), as well as the regulation of urban spaces (whether people are able to sleep in the open or beg at all, for example). While structural factors create general conditions for defiled surpluses, they can only be exploited through the convergence with individual characteristics. The next section examines these defiled surpluses in Dhaka.

#### 9.1.2. EXPLOITING THE CITY

Contrary to public perceptions, the majority of people who live in the open or the most basic slums in Dhaka earn far more than the thresholds used to categorize “the poor” and “extreme poor”. That this is the case points in part to serious weaknesses in poverty lines as tools for measuring poverty<sup>210</sup>. However, in general I found that such people could earn not only beyond poverty thresholds, but often even more than low-level university educated professionals. This finding is born from long-term and systematic observations, as well as triangulation through conversations with labour leaders, recycled goods shop owners and NGO staff. Strikingly, NGO fieldworkers openly acknowledged that some project “beneficiaries” living on pavements earned more on a monthly basis than they did. They explained that they had learnt this from years working in the context as well as conducting internal monitoring activities. This finding is not confined to those working in sectors with organised labour. Hassan, an experienced scavenger of almost three decades who sleeps outside a University of Dhaka hall, explained the situation as he saw it:

*There’s lots of money in doing tokai. If you work well, you can make at least 500 taka a day... If the market is very bad, if you can’t even collect the smallest amount, you would still make 300-400 per day. And if someone goes to a “spot dustbin”, “moyla top”... Like this morning I couldn’t find any goods, I went early in the morning, I couldn’t find anything, nothing, nothing, I only had*

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<sup>210</sup> It is well established that income and expenditure measures fail to account for the diverse aspects of poverty (Green and Hulme 2005; Boonyabancha et al 2015) and the cost of urban living. It has also been argued that the “cost of basic needs approach” used fails to consider the heavier reliance of urban households on cash income to survive, being unable to live from homestead or agricultural land (Rahman 2011), or the price differentials between urban and rural areas for food and basic non-food items (Banks et al 2011).

*3KG of recyclable goods in my bag, some boards, this and that, the goods will be worth around 100 taka, maybe only 70 or 80. And then I was coming back and I found 10 KG in one spot... 1KG is worth about 25 taka. That was this morning.*

Put another way, on a monthly basis some scavengers can earn significantly more than the official salary of a traffic police constable<sup>211</sup>. The earnings of rickshaw van drivers at Karwan Bazar fluctuated from a minimum 300 *taka* (this is rare, and when I observed was due to the blockades and strikes preventing goods enter into Dhaka), to around 1000 or even more a night. Nazir once said to me *where else in the whole of Bangladesh would you get paid 100 taka to move these goods from the truck to just round the corner? Nowhere!* Similarly, income in pocket was described by street-based sex workers as about 400– 600 *taka* a night for older or less attractive women (as they explained it), and for the lighter-skinned, younger, more beautiful women around 1,000–2,000 *taka*. The beggars without disabilities I knew typically earned between 300 and 600 *taka* a day, and those with disabilities earned more, even up to 1,000 *taka* a day. Some disabled beggars living on pavements have young assistants to whom they pay 10,000-*taka* monthly salaries. Rina, a single woman who was thrown out of her village by her husband a couple of years ago, came to Dhaka by boat and started to live in the Supreme Court area. She described her experiences:

*I used to beg, walking around, I went to Chawk Bazar, Shabagh... I earnt about 500, 600, 700 taka a day... If the police caught us, they would take all our money, but they couldn't. Whenever we saw a police van, then we ran away from them.*

These illustrations should be qualified. Though they are born from systematic observation and questioning over a long period with many people, I have not used any statistical methods. The areas in which I have researched are busy, economically dynamic areas where higher incomes would be more expected. Furthermore, the livelihoods of Rina, Hassan and others like them all represent significant risks and vulnerabilities, they are subject to seasonal fluctuations, and households have differing dependency ratios. The health risks associated with scavenging, for example, have been well documented (Wilson et al 2006; Tevera 1994). Research from India indicates the significance of police harassment to children (Patel 1990) and adults (Huysman 1994) living in the open, and the significance of health shocks and life events more generally for the urban poor can seriously threaten any gains made (Krishna et al 2014). Studies from Bangladesh have noted the experiences of violence and poor health amongst people living in the open (Koehlmoos et al 2009). This is also not to negate that the underlying reasons for people to live in such contexts are most often related to such hardships as environmental degradation, indebtedness, lack of

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<sup>211</sup> Of course the 'official salary' of a police constable is rarely their true salary due to *chanda* and bribes.

employment and family breakdown.

The basic point however is that occupying what are perceived as the lowest-status forms of work and poorest-quality of spaces for living in Dhaka City can reduce expenses and thereby increase incomes. A proposition then emerges: some such people could in fact afford to live in the more established and serviced *bosti*. It is often assumed that people live in these seemingly desperate places because they cannot live elsewhere. But one way in which the situation is often understood by those living there is in terms of having *lower* or *no costs*. A primary reason why people choose to live in these spaces is that it avoids certain forms of mediated access to housing. As an NGO fieldworker put it to me once of a *potho-bosti* – *almost everyone here could actually live in the bosti if they wanted to*. Choton, who lives in a *potho-bosti* opposite the headquarters of a major international bank and works as a scavenger, explained:

*You see the people in this area? They earn three or four hundred taka in a day, some earn five hundred daily. In one day they work hard to earn that. But they keep that money, many don't spend it. Saving little by little they make it a large amount, and then they take it back to the village. Then they invest it in some work, maybe for land or building a house, and then they come back here again. This way they become a little bit settled and later we see they've been able to give their children a better life.*

The basic dynamic described in this passage was a common one. Through sacrificing a degree of immediate security, people working as beggars, labourers, scavengers, maids and sex workers are able to channel resources elsewhere. The intended uses of these savings differ – some migrate to save up for a daughter's dowry, others to buy land, others to invest in business, others simply to feed their families. In Dhaka's bazars people pass through for a week working as a coolie by day, later sleeping on the market floor or on the footpath, lying curved in their baskets. People travel to the city to beg, perhaps for a week, sometimes even daily, and most noticeably around religious festivals. Some stay for months, others only return once a year. The amounts of time spent in either location clearly differ but the basic logic is similar. Nijam, for example, was by his own estimate in his 50s and when I met him and had been living outside the office of an international business at Karwan Bazar for two years. He is from Jamalpur in the north of the country, where he has four daughters. He described having only a small plot of land and needing to save for their dowries. He begged around central Dhaka by day, focusing particularly on the five-star Sonargaon hotel. From this he earned around 500 *taka* daily, of which he spent about 120 *taka* buying food from street restaurants, and was able to save around 300 *taka* a day. Every couple of days or once a week he sent this back to his village via bKash, the mobile-based money transfer service. Nijam planned to spend a couple more years like this in Dhaka. Similarly the vast majority of labourers within the *jupri* group sent money to family in a home village or *bosti*, as did all of the beggars outside the Supreme Court that I met, and most of the drain labourers at Osmani Uddayan park.

Parveen, a woman living in *Pantho Kunjo* pavement nearby Karwan Bazar, reflected on the situation on her pavement: *some people here have two storied buildings back in the village...* She then counted the names of six or seven local people on her fingers. *They have a good situation but come here and sleep on the street.* Many (but not all) of the rickshaw van drivers at Karwan Bazar within the jupri group, and the waste workers in Osmani Uddyan, and the beggars outside the Supreme Court, have families and homes elsewhere, where they channel the money they earn. Other have saved up, but not yet invested. A notable example was Nijam, a 15-year-old labourer who had grown up in NGO centres from the age of around five, when he described coming to Dhaka alone on a train. Working unloading vegetables at Karwan Bazar, where he also lived, he had diligently saved up two *lakh taka* (over US\$ 2,500), deposited safely in a Dutch- Bangla Bank account. This dynamics resonate with the descriptions heard in chapter three of the low-caste and class groups in 19<sup>th</sup> century Dhaka, though not necessarily relating to people living in the open. This suggests that the people living in the open or in the most basic slums on public land are at one extreme of the much broader spectrum of people who migrate for low-status work. This reinforces an argument made by other authors that living in the open can be a temporary strategy of “supplementation” to livelihoods elsewhere (Speak 2004), and can also form part of “traditional, long-standing livelihood strategies” (Tipple and Speak 2009)<sup>212</sup>.

Critically however, the potential for these defiled surpluses is contingent on both people’s personal characteristics – such as whether they have the wider connections which represent somewhere to channel money, and the ability and temperament to work and live in these spaces – but also wider structural factors. It is the convergence of these factors, which enables these defiled surpluses to in fact be resources. These factors connect deeply to the nature of social order. As has already been argued, a large part of what makes these defiled surpluses resources is that they are largely beyond the grip of the ruling coalition. A further important factor is the radical decline in crime and violence seen in Dhaka over the past decade or so with what has been termed the ‘party politicization of criminality’ and the decline of gangsters, as explored in chapter six. This has led to far less risks associated with living on the pavements, far less violence and robberies. Connected to the risks that do undoubtedly remain when living in these spaces, is the important role that new technology such as digital money transfer services now plays.

As seen in the case of Nijam, the utility of defiled surpluses has been enabled through the growth of mobile-based money transfer services such as bKash. This and similar services allow people to quickly and cheaply transfer money across the country through a vast network of registered agents, who are often based on streets and in

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<sup>212</sup> It also supports the point that people are strategic about where they live in the urban context. Writing of Kolkata, Furedy (1984: 130) argues that scavengers ‘will position themselves as close as possible to the wastes they covet’, which tend to be central business areas near hotels and offices. Analysing pavement dwellers in Bombay, Patel (1990: 11) similarly argues that some ‘chose the location because of its proximity to their place of work’.



shops. Across Dhaka people spoke very highly of this service, and explained that it has radically improved their ability to benefit from such spaces by improving security. Anwar explained: *Ah, bKash! Through bKash you can send money from here to England!... It's good, the thieves can't steal it. The creation of bKash has made things very convenient for us.* Others described being far less reliant on both informal networks back to the village as well as on local shopkeepers, and therefore less vulnerable to theft and exploitative relationships either in Dhaka or in their village. Abul, a market labourer who grew up in Karwan Bazar, explained:

*There used to be lots and lots of robberies here. People always had their money stolen. But nowadays it's different, people don't carry lots of money anymore. If we have 500 taka we can send it through bKash. Before when we used to go home, then the local groups [in the village] also used to rob us, but now we have bKash so they can't. It's been going for about 5 years. Nowadays it's very easy you can stay inside your room and get the money.*

This section has argued that not all valuable resources in the urban context are controlled and exploited by those in the ruling coalition. Defiled surpluses can be exploited in ways that facilitate improvements in people's livelihoods, albeit by accepting a status and association, which for most in society is marginalizing and demeaning. Not everyone however is able to exploit these, and recognizing this gives insight into the nature of the stark destitution that does exist among the *kangali*. For people without wider connections, the opportunity to invest and support others does not necessarily exist. For people with wider connections but not functioning relationships, these opportunities similarly cannot be exploited. The costs of associating with the defiled are furthermore not equally distributed, and single women without a male "guardian" are particularly worse off. For such women an association with the streets and that which is defiled leads them to becoming considered *nosto* (broken, spoiled), and closes down the future ability to exist within wider society. A key message however from this section has been that people are actively and creatively pursuing their interests.

It is also important to acknowledge that although the concept of 'defiled surpluses' has been presented as a counterpoint to the proposition of 'living in the shade of others' - representing how people avoid certain forms of intermediation and pointing to the limits of the control that intermediaries have – in practice, these phenomenon interact and co-exist within people's lives. Many of the labourers in the *jupri* group for example have built or re-established relationships with family in the villages (either their own or their partner's family). Though enmeshed in complex and risky dependencies, they also reduce expenditure through sleeping on their rickshaw vans behind the buses and are thus able to send more money to family elsewhere. Furthermore, as argued in chapter six, these dependencies are not experienced equally by all of the *kangali*, and while we can point to trends and probabilities in likely dynamics, these relationships may be experienced positively, and therefore

complement the defiled surpluses proposition. Hence many of the people living on Pantho Kunjo pavement described their relationship with the reformed *mastan* Jahangir positively, and as protecting them when needed thereby helping them in their efforts to save money, support family and build livelihoods elsewhere. The second half of this chapter builds on these arguments by examining the subtle ways in which people try to gain, improve and maintain access to resources.

## 9.2. NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES AND TIES

### 9.2.1. BUILDING TIES AND ROLE-PLAYING

*It looks like a bosti but it isn't, it's a "business centre"*

Liton and Abdul pointing to Dhaka's largest drug market

Everyday, subtle, and strategic ways in which the urban poor gain and maintain access to resources, thereby pursuing their livelihoods and interests, are through role-playing and lying. This is an important part of people's experience exploiting defiled surpluses, but also a much wider dynamic to social life. That people approach social interaction with particular intentions can be taken as a basic characteristic of social life, one that is as true of 'the poor' as it is for 'the rich' and 'elites' (Goffman 1956; Rosen 1984). People's intentions to social interaction in everyday life vary. They may be to please, to impress, to compliment, to 'defraud, get rid of, confuse, mislead, antagonize, or insult' others for example (Goffman 1956: 2). A further basic characteristic of social life is that people try to place or categorise others in meaningful ways on the basis of the social and cultural categories to which they have access and in which they operate. Rosen (1984: 57) argues that

A person's origins, ethnicity, family, occupation and other social identifications contribute to that person's assessment by others. In a world of uncertain personal relationships – a world in which the threat of potential chaos is met, on the level of interpersonal ties, by the elaborate placement of another in his social contexts – the focus is at once on the typological features of an individual and the unique summation of these qualities in an individual personality.

Placing these two characteristics of social life together opens up a way of examining how people negotiate an environment in which personal relationships and ties are paramount to gaining and negotiating access to resources. Accepting then that people approach social interaction with particular intentions, it can also be accepted that people are interested in how to 'control the conduct of others, especially their responsive treatment' (Goffman 1956: 2). If social interaction is purposeful, then influencing people's responses is part of this. One way in which this is done – so Goffman argues – is by presenting oneself in such a way that gives others the desired impressions and evokes certain responses. People wish to 'project a definition of a

situation' (Ibid: 3) through their behaviour which they hope others will buy into. People may or may not be conscious that they are doing this, sometimes acting out of tradition and custom, while sometimes very conscious of this intended projection. There is then a sense in which people are 'performers', who have a 'front' that they face to the world (Ibid: 13).

People attempt to manage others' perceptions in a variety of ways, for example through their appearance, by controlling knowledge or by lying. We can reflect on such strategies in our own lives, how people purposefully try and appear in a way that gives others certain impressions about them, impressions which may in fact not correspond with that person's life or how they feel but which are in some way instrumental to something else. Hence people try and dress to impress, they comport themselves in manners so as to fit into socially valuable categories, budding academics wish to appear intelligent, professionals competent. The proposition here is that this notion of role-playing can equally be applied to the lives of the *kangali*. This has already been briefly discussed in relation to Liton's attempts at becoming a new *boro bhai* within the *jupri* group at Karwan Bazar. These 'arts of impression management' (Ibid: 132) are tools of the weak, powerful and pervasive tactics that the poor use to survive and advance their access arrangements through intermediaries.

Some of the *kangali* often try to create, maintain or improve access to resources on the basis of their status as *kangali*, which is to say, as being poor. This is therefore intimately connected to how people exploit defiled surpluses. Goffman (1956) argues that every society is based on principles about the moral rights people with particular characteristics have. The argument here is that people's projections of themselves often try and adhere to culturally defined notions of deserved poor, and thereby make moral claims on wider society. Wood (2003) understands this in terms of 'moral proximity' and the attempts by those worse off to draw people of status into their 'moral universe', thereby developing obligations and longer-term ties. We can think for example of a beggar who attempts to build relationships with 'patrons' with the hope of a longer-term dependency (Ibid). The starting point by which people try and draw people into their 'moral universe' is by having their projection of reality accepted, thus being acknowledged as poor. By asserting their subservient and desperate status some people hope to invoke people's sense of moral responsibility.

The *kangali* recognise this disconnect in their own contexts. In discussing the rail line *bosti* adjacent to Karwan Bazar with Abdul and Liton, for example, they were both adamant that it should not be called a *bosti* but rather a "*business centre*". This was on account of it being one of Dhaka's centres for the supply of drugs, with many people living there moving from the village and earning very significant amounts of money. Akash, a younger van driver, reflected:

*You see the bosti it looks poor from the outside, but inside they sometimes keep two or three crores taka of goods in the room, they have a fridge and tv in their*

*room, they purchase land in their villages. But one blow [dakiy] can make them lose everything. RAB could catch them.*

The point Abdul emphasised was that people have to look like a *kangali* to live and work there, but they actually have a very good situation. As Liton put it:

*Look at me, I wear these dirty clothes but actually I have a good income. In the same way, maybe someone looks like a rich man, he wears nice clothes and sunglasses, but he is actually poor, he actually has nothing.*<sup>213</sup>

What this suggests is that identifying as a *kangali* can be of instrumental value, and that people purposefully and actively identify with it in order to pursue their interests. On a number of occasions, for example, local people in research contexts would make off the cuff comments to me in the vein of – *you think these people are poor? You don't understand their situation* and during a short piece of field work in Kolkata, this was even clearer. I recall a conversation with a *fakir/Baul*<sup>214</sup> follower at Gulistan *mazar*. He was angry that so many people who live there are not in fact *true pagol* (true mad people), as he put it, but are just pretending. Pointing to others nearby he said that 90% of the people who live at the *mazar* are just acting as if they are *pagol*, but are not really. They know that if they dress like this and live at these places, people will give them money to say prayers, and that people will feed them. His claim is then that people seek advantage by fitting into a socially valued and recognised category of deserving alms or deserving money for prayers.

Similarly beggars have to craft an image that fits into a socially acceptable category of a “deserved” poor person, someone who has a right to ask for alms. Beggars have to look poor and helpless, and their tone of voice (using imploring language) and body language (often hunched, head lowered) are often intended to conform to this image, denigrating themselves in front of others. In many cases this is not difficult – where someone is disabled for example. However it is common – in Dhaka at least - for people to publically parade their disability, or the disability of others. For example, Anwar the *samiti* cashier we heard of in chapter seven is by all accounts wealthy within the context, far more so than field level NGO staff for example. And yet every morning he comes outside the Dhaka Press Club where he lies in the floor *shaking his legs* and *rolling on the floor* reciting religious texts as one person who lives outside the Supreme Court put it. The point is not to judge him, but to highlight that to beg people have to play roles – in this case from a powerful *samiti* leader to a helpless disabled man. A further example is that of a woman called Reka at *pantha kunjo* pavement. I learnt from NGO staff and people living on the pavement that for years she had been pretending to be deaf, and used to beg on that basis around the area, making sounds as if she were deaf. I similarly knew beggars who adopted overtly religious clothes for a

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<sup>213</sup> Similarly, I remember meeting a man who works as a drug dealer at Kamalapur explaining that he is actually wealthy but just has to wear clothes that appear poor to fit in at Kamalapur when he comes.

<sup>214</sup> Bauls are a religious sect in Bangladesh and West Bengal that combine elements of Sufi Islamic and Hindu teachings and are famous for their songs and oral traditions.

days work, constantly invoking religious texts, before changing into regular non-religious clothes at the end of the day. Clearly children have learnt the strategies and images they need to portray, even from a strikingly young age, and it is hard to avoid demands in English for “*one hundred taka!*” from young children<sup>215</sup>.

An example of role-playing at its most theatrical is the distribution of blankets in winter to the *kangali*. During the winter 2014/2015 I witnessed this at both Kamalapur station and on a number of occasions outside the Supreme Court. In these instances, a car or rickshaw van approached and crowds quickly formed, blankets were passed, grabbed, thrown to the crowds, with the inevitable scuffles and shouts. Indeed, yearly during winter people migrate to the streets of Dhaka from the villages explicitly to collect as many blankets as they can, often selling them or taking them back to the villages. Those I knew at the Supreme Court complained that the true *kangali* were not able to get blankets because gangs of blanket stealers descended on the area<sup>216</sup>. I similarly kept track of a group of beggars over a couple of weeks at Tejgaon station who came into the city by train regularly to beg, before heading back to their villages. They had begun depositing savings with the Sajida Foundation, because, so NGO staff suggested, they knew the NGO were planning on distributing blankets. Once they were distributed, they withdrew their deposits, and stopped speaking to them<sup>217</sup>. This is not to judge these people or to claim that they are not deserved of help, but simply to point to the constructed way in which people have to make claims.

As a foreign researcher it was common for me to be in the receiving end of people’s attempt to bring me into their ‘moral universe’. I experienced it most starkly with a young woman called Monwara, a case that illustrates the significance of role-playing even where people do closely conform to the image they wish to portray. Following the death of her husband Monwara had been unable to pay rent at Kamrangichar *bosti* so joined her mother and sister at *pantha kunjo* pavement. She was however excluded from the main pavement, kept further afield under plastic sheeting with her three young children<sup>218</sup>. Living there I observed how she continuously had to publically assert her status, would often face questions from nearby office workers on a break, and she would emphasise to anyone in earshot how her husband had died (not left her or divorced, she would make clear). Despite her situation she would very often insist on buying me tea and a banana. I interpreted this on one level as generosity. An indication of respect, all conditioned by Bangladeshi-Islamic-South Asian norms

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<sup>215</sup> Interestingly with foreigners some can be much more demanding in a way they would not dare to be with Bangladeshis, the strategy must have been honed to fit the audience.

<sup>216</sup> Meanwhile the young men distributing blankets were insistent on groups posing with them for a photo, saying in English “*facebook smiles*”.

<sup>217</sup> In a similar vein, NGO staff even told me about beggars at the Supreme Court demanding money in return for information to put them on beneficiary lists.

<sup>218</sup> She explained not being allowed to sleep on the main footpath because of the local park mullah, who did not like a single woman being on the street. Others identified a particularly established and disagreeable couple living on the footpath who did not want her encroaching on their space. Interestingly then her status as being acutely vulnerable was a justification by some for denying her access.

about welcoming guests. On another level I interpreted these ‘gifts’ as an attempt to create an obligation, which she foresaw leveraging somehow to her own advantage. A gift, or just communication in itself, can all affect what Rosen (1984) termed the ‘balance of obligations’<sup>219</sup>.

Over the days, weeks and months, our conversations naturally came round to the role I could play in Monwara’s life, as it did with many others. *I have no security... I just need a job. You don’t even have to pay me. Just shelter and food*, she told me. Later on she would try and persuade me to shelter her youngest baby, *if I give it to you for ten months before you leave, she will get fat like other babies and I can be free to work*. Despite the acute vulnerability and needs, a striking feature of Monwara’s attempts to bring me into her moral universe was that they were also in a sense performed. On a number of occasions Monwara’s narratives about the role I could play would be in tears, imploring me to action. But just as quickly as tears appeared, they would stop. Being interrupted by her sister because one of the children had wet themselves, or being met with a comment she disagreed with, she would snap out of her submissive status and resolve the situation, before returning again to me. The point is that even when people’s situations *do* fit into socially valued categories, they may utilise generic tactics to enact or play out their role.

A further tool people use to negotiate access, is controlling knowledge or lying. Similar to the ways researchers have to be strategic with the truth in order to maintain access to research contexts in a sustainable and manageable way, so to do the *kangali*. There is a widespread perception among NGO staff I knew, as well as the wider public, that the *kangali* lie. *They are liars, they won’t tell you the truth, they are chalak* (shrewd, cunning), I often heard<sup>220</sup>. Rather than seeing these as either incorrect crude stereotypes, or as evidence of immorality, they could be seen as evidence of people trying to negotiate opportunities using one of the few tools at their disposal. Lies or controlling knowledge can take many forms – it can be flagrant or more subtle, for example an omission or purposeful ambiguity. Lies can also be instrumental to many ends, for example being defensive or opportunistic. I often directly encountered or heard about the constructive use of lying in the research contexts studied. Anwar, the *cripples samiti* leader continuously denied the existence of a *samiti* to me, being lambasted by others nearby on the pavement as *chalak* for his denials. As he said to me

*If someone wants to make a new samiti, they need a well-educated person. But disabled people like us can’t do that. Someone who has only lost one of his hands, he might be able to write. They have to go up stairs two or three stories.*

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<sup>219</sup> I similarly recall the attempts by young rickshaw van drivers to buy local political leaders tea as they passed through Karwan Bazar – *boro bhai, come, drink tea*. This everyday behaviour can be understood as part of tactics to negotiate access. We can think about how a deferential greeting, for example, is anticipated by its giver, measured in its tone and calculated in its intended effect.

<sup>220</sup> Street children are often seen in public discourse as being particularly knowledgeable and shrewd (chalak).

*We need an educated person like him who has at least one hand. If we want to form something, we need an educated person.*

More generally, it was common to hear stories of *samiti* cashier encouraging beliefs about the benefits of the *samiti* meanwhile planning to run away with the money. In the case of rickshaw van drivers I directly heard some describe how they would have to pretend to the *sardar* that they did not steal the missing bag of carrots, though they secretly did. In the case of some potential NGO beneficiaries there was a very clear sense that they would astutely judge the NGO staff, constructing certain stories and images about themselves in order to adhere to what they perceived to be the categories which NGOs value. Women, for example, saying they are unmarried and that they have no land in their village, when both are in fact false. People saying they only earn 200 *taka* a day, but being shouted at by their *boro bhai* for lying to me. Children pretending they are from different districts, wary of what consequences the knowledge in other hands could lead to. Role-playing and lying may be a means of covering subtle tactics for shifting the balance of resources within a relationship. In terms of work for example, this could mean slacking or it could be hiding theft, appropriating a greater share of resources than agreed upon. Hence I heard examples of helpers to beggars reportedly siphoning off small amounts of the money from that which they collect on behalf of the disabled beggars.<sup>221</sup> Understood in relation to intermediation and the negotiation of access to resources, role playing or lying constitute everyday and subtle tools by which the *kangali* pursue their livelihoods and interests.

#### 9.2.2. MAINTAINING WEAK TIES

*There's no advantage to bringing enemies into my life*  
Sayeed, teenage rickshaw van driver at Karwan Bazar

Where people cannot or do not wish to demonstrate a capability for violence, and where people are able to maintain access to resources without significant dependencies on the powerful actors examined in this thesis, then the possibility of such relationship can pose a threat. Relationships with party political actors and labour leaders may bring opportunities, but they also bring risks and obligations, as explored through chapters six to eight. An important dynamic to the way in which the *kangali* negotiate

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<sup>221</sup> Some of these descriptions resonate with the notion of 'hustling'. Though the term has connotations of sex work in a US context, in its broader use it conjures up well a sense of fluidity and dynamism, the almost entrepreneurial image of people trying to make the most 'by hook or by crook'. In its cultural origins in lower class neighbourhoods in the US, the notion of hustling has strong connotations of criminality and deception. As Wacquant (1998: 3) writes, it refers to 'the ability to manipulate others, to inveigle and deceive them, if need be by joining violence to chicanery and charm'. As such, it 'stands in structural opposition to that of wage labor in which, at least in theory, everything is legal, recognized, regular and regulated, recorded and approved by the law' (Ibid: 3). In some African contexts where American popular culture has influence however, the term hustling can have broader connotations. Thieme (2013: 400) describes the notion of hustling as it is used by waste workers living in slums in Nairobi: 'Hustling was the attempt, the "trying" to defy the odds and traps of poverty'. An approximate concept could be how people 'wangle' something, or 'wrangle' something out of someone.

their environment is strategically maintaining weak ties with powerful people, or avoiding making ties at all. That people choose to live in certain spaces and in certain ways in order to avoid relationships is an essential part of the defiled surpluses proposition. In practice however maintaining weak ties and living in the shade of others are not mutually exclusive, but intertwine in complex ways<sup>222</sup>.

The notion of maintaining weak ties is partly captured in English through the expressions ‘keeping your head down’. The logic of such behaviour is uniform – not interacting seems the best strategy to avoid a situation that creates obligations, expectations and demands that would in some way decrease, threaten or destroy the quality of access experienced. By doing so they maintain a set of access arrangements, be it related to space, work, security or whatever else. This tool or strategy can be seen in very ordinary and everyday occurrences. It should not be imagined as a getaway car or jumping out the window, but more as a glance not taken, or a dark alleyway avoided. I found this strategy all over – from young rickshaw van drivers moving into the world of adulthood, to adult labourers, to single and vulnerable women, and even NGOs.

As described in previous chapters, teenagers and men at Karwan Bazar are often called to participate in party political meetings, as they are elsewhere in Dhaka. The events themselves may be uneventful. Attending a meeting, sitting in a chair, chanting the name of a leader. They may even get some money or perhaps *biryani*. The fact of going in itself may however be far more significant. Noyon, one of the young van drivers, described not liking politics at all, involvement would lead one person to call him, then another, and would create an adulteration (*bhezal*), as one would describe polluted food, meaning a complex or corrupt situation. Sayeed described how the *whole country is becoming political now (ekon deshta choltese razniti upore)*, bringing obligations to be involved closer and closer to daily life in the bazar. He knows the *boro bhai* (referring to the local Awami League leaders), but he pretends not to. Sayeed and a number of his friends were called by Parvez and others during the fight with the *Chattro League*. Sayeed described it:

*I saw them fighting, and they started calling us to join. I was going to but I saw the fighting was so “heavy”. I realised something terrible might happen and it could be bad fortune (kopal) for us to go there. If I had joined them and something happened like the police caught me, it would have been a tough time for my family. We aren’t rich. We spend what we earn, so it would have been very difficult for us. It would take time for the news to come to the [Aparajeyo] centre, and during this time I will be in detention and the police will ask me many things... I have no-one to support me... so that’s why I didn’t join the fighting. The leaders have money, so they can arrange this sort of fighting, and*

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<sup>222</sup> Though the term ‘weak ties’ is used, I am not intending to build on Granovetter’s (1973) work on ‘the strength of weak ties’. Similar to Granovetter I am arguing for the significance of weak ties to enabling opportunities, but in the argument here the ties described are more likely to work against the opportunity than for it, as in Granovetter’s model.



*they can hire “killer” [Chattro League], but we are children from poor families.*

*But what did Parvez say after you didn't go?* I asked.

*At the moment I don't see him, I don't take care about him. If I see him he'll say “hey, don't you know me? Did you forget me? After this fight you don't come to me. I called you to come to the programme and you don't come. Go away!” I don't want to listen to that and don't need to go to him. I will be blamed, maybe he will say that he should beat me up, so why do I need that? When I see him sitting there, I take my van the other way around.*

Reflecting back on the days he and others used to steal vegetables, Sayeed similarly explained how even though there was a local *boro bhai* who did *Awami League* politics, they would not go to him, even though he could solve problems and lend them money when they needed it. *Why?* I asked. Sayeed described how he could create more problems, he would involve them in fighting, he would take money, and when they really needed him, he would not be there. They would take the blame and not him. Alongside the links that Jewel's *moyla* workers have to maintain with the local wings of the *Jubo League*, as individuals the labourers have diverse interests. Some were described to me as thieves involved in all sorts of risky violence and closely connected to *Awami League* actors, while others were far more cautious in their political involvement. I asked a small group if they had any connection to the local *Sramik League*. Neymar replied

*No! We don't have any relationship with them. If we go there we will have to go to meetings, processions, and get into fights. We don't need this. We aren't within politics we are within belly-tics! (amra razneti bitorey na. Amra petnetir bitorey!) We work, we eat and sleep. If I can't get work today, my brother here will give me the money, not the party people. If I can't get food today, I can take 10 taka from Jewel bhai to eat. Tomorrow if I can't find any work then I can borrow money from someone else. But if I do party work they won't feed me... maybe he will have 5000 million taka, but at the end he will get 3.5 yards of land like me<sup>223</sup>.*

Involvement in politics is seen here as a fruitless choice. To some it may hold hope of large rewards, but others see this as a veneer. The conversation with the *moyla* workers continued. I was told *it's better to have small fishes everyday than one big fish for one day... if I go to the procession for 200 taka and a bomb blasts I could die, so why would I go?* Similar to the stories of men avoiding being used as fodder for political interests, I also heard stories of women avoiding the interests of political leaders and *chamcha*. Anika described Antara's story to me. Antara arrived recently at *Osmani Uddyan* not knowing anyone so stayed at the park for a couple of nights. She was

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<sup>223</sup> Neymar is expressing a futility about doing politics here, emphasizing how the risks involved are so great that even if you earn lots now, in the end you will end up with very little.

brought to the attention of the local *Jubo League* leaders, Ratan *bhai* and Masum *bhai* who *took her into their hold* (as in, took control over her) and said “*come with us*”. She tricked them, saying “*Brother, not now, later. This is my number. Call me at night*”. She then came straight to the *Amrao Manush* centre where she *broke her sim straight away... Now she doesn’t go back*.

Not only do the *kangali* purposefully avoid involvement with these party *neta* and *boro bhai*, but so to do NGOs. Across Dhaka NGO field staff explained similar situations in relation to local political leaders. In chapter six I made the argument that these NGOs are largely powerless in directly confronting these leaders’ interests. To build on this argument, it is important to recognise that NGOs often avoid contact with party political leaders and followers altogether. A number of centre managers described how they need to keep a *little* or minimal relationship with them, but beyond this, they do not want a relationship with them, while others described not even wanting to speak to them. Relationships were perceived as bringing obligations and threats, or more accurately, opening up avenues for these actors to leverage any perceived weaknesses or needs that the NGO had, to their own – often financial – advantage. Staff and managers described how were they to begin a relationship then these leaders would start coming to the centres, creating problems for their work, such as asking for *chanda*. Maintaining weak ties can thus be seen as a tool of the weak, a means by which certain forms of mediated access are avoided, and a way of not entering into dependencies that represent risk.

### 9.3. CONCLUSION

This chapter has offered an important counterweight to key arguments developed in this thesis. Despite the fact that the ruling coalition weaves its way down to the lowest hierarchical levels of urban life, and that powerful intermediaries are common in the lives of the *kangali*, it has been argued that the grasp these actors have on resources is not total, and that the *kangali* actively exploit these gaps. Access to the open space in which people often live in Dhaka, to money gained through begging, or to recyclable goods laying strewn around the city, are not for the most part mediated by others. Exploiting these can be a means of reducing expenditure and help avoid the risks associated with intermediaries, such as the necessity to participate in political violence. These have been conceptualised here as ‘defiled surpluses’, resources that can be productively exploited but at the cost of an association with the defiled. These can be seen as materialising through the convergence of a range of factors, including having relationships elsewhere, and the ability to bear the costs of an association with the defiled, which is not felt equally (Jackman 2016).

Exploiting these gaps helps avoid the complex and often high-risk dependencies that intermediation can necessitate. Furthermore, even when people do depend on an intermediary, the risks these relationships pose are negotiated. People creatively try and maintain weak ties, gaining access to resources, but avoiding some of the obligations that these opportunities can represent. These strategies are supported

through tools such as lying and role-playing, which people utilise in everyday life to help pursue their interests, negotiate access and its terms. The majority of the *kangali* thus pursue opportunities to improve their lives without demonstrating a capability for violence, but creatively negotiating around the violence capabilities of others. These strategies thus sit alongside the attempts people make to work their way up the social order as described in the preceding chapter. In practice, these dynamics intertwine in people's lives in complex ways. Hence some of the *kangali*, for example, are heavily dependent on labour leaders, or required to participate politically and give *chanda* to political leaders, while also reducing expenditure by living in the open, enabling them to invest elsewhere.

## 10. CONCLUSION

*It isn't possible for everyone to be good. It also isn't possible for everyone to be bad.*

*The world is mixed between good and bad*

Marium, formerly of *pantha kunjo* pavement-slum and now an NGO centre cleaner

This thesis has examined how the *kangali* live in the shade of others, and how these relationships are conditioned by the nature of social order in Bangladesh. The dynamics studied are diverse, from the descriptions of Golap's life as a vegetable thief seeking protection from a drug dealer, or as a bus driver under the shelter of a *Sramik League* leader; to the accounts of *chanda*, labour leaders, political factions and violent political mobilisation. Examining the lives of the *kangali* in a range of contexts including a bazar, some pavements and a park have offered insight into how order is constituted in microcosm, and how this can account for some of the complexity of this shade. The overarching question posed in this thesis regarding how the *kangali* relate to the social order has been responded to through conceptualising intermediation in relation to the capability for violence, the ruling coalition and social order.

This chapter revisits the three sub-questions posed in the methodology, consolidates the core arguments of this thesis and reflects on their wider significance. The first half of this chapter responds to questions regarding the forms of intermediation experienced by the *kangali* and how these are negotiated. It re-articulates the core concept of the politics of intermediation in light of the empirical findings, and examines what insights this offers us in the lives of the *kangali*. The second half of this chapter asks what the research tells us about the nature of social order in Bangladesh. This section consolidates arguments concerning how the capability for violence is organised in Bangladesh, and reflects longer term on Bangladesh's future, and scope for further research.

## 10.1. THE POLITICS OF INTERMEDIATION

### 1.1.1. THE CORE ARGUMENT

The politics of intermediation (Devine 1999) was introduced in chapter two as a way of conceptualizing the negotiation of access to resources in a society characterized by violent intermediaries. This section retraces this theoretical argument, and reflects on this concept in light of the empirical arguments made. A premise of this thesis has been to understand social order in Bangladesh as stemming from how a dispersed set of actors with a capability for violence form a coalition (North et al 2009). A further premise has been to see this coalition as formed from actors at different levels of society (Khan 2010b, 2013), and hence Bangladesh's political settlement involves societal elites, but also networks which weave down throughout society to the grassroots. This framework draws attention to the structural significance of 'violence specialists' (Tilly 2003). According to this model, social order stems from actors within the coalition extracting resources from society, and controlling the access that others have to resources. This process enables order by incentivising actors with a capability for violence not to be violent, and by these actors dominating potential rivals outside of the coalition. Logically, the structures and processes by which a capability for violence is constituted, and by which resources are extracted, are fundamental to how social order is maintained.

A concept employed in this thesis and fundamental to the model of social order above, is that of a 'ruling coalition'. How actors within this coalition are identified in any given context has not been explored empirically in microcosm before. This thesis has demonstrated how a capability for violence is dispersed through a wide set of actors. Though the *kangali* commonly identify key ruling party leaders and their followers in Awami League organisations as the dominant actors with a capability for violence, these actors also rely on others to maintain this capability. Groups of labourers organized under a *sardar* or *boro bhai* often participate politically, and compete for status through party political connections. The degree of party political affiliation differs, while some have registration with particular bodies within the Awami League, some operate as freer agents, and some align with the opposition. There are layers of political affiliation, such that political affiliation can be a *tangle (patch)*, as the *boro bhai* Rubel described it in the *jupri* group. These findings problematize the notion of a ruling coalition if it is seen as drawing a sharp distinction between actors being 'in' and 'out'. Though political affiliation and identity is clear cut for some, for many it is more ambiguous, and a question of degree, aspect and context.

The focus of thesis has been to think through the significance of this model of social order for the *kangali*, a sub-group of the urban poor often considered to be the most poor and marginalized. The key conceptual step taken was to argue that social order manifests itself in the lives of the *kangali* through the notion of intermediation. Intermediation is the need for personalistic dependencies on more powerful actors to gain access to resources needed to pursue one's livelihood and interests. When social

order is premised on the dominance of a ruling coalition, actors within this coalition need and very often wish to accrue resources. This thesis has argued that mediating the access others have to resources is a key means by which this is achieved. As such intermediation is intertwined with how violence is organised, and hence central to how social order is maintained. This argument thereby recasts a long history of work on brokerage and intermediation around the organization of violence<sup>224</sup>. Empirical findings substantiate this posited relationship, but also point to its limits. The control of a ruling coalition over resources is not total. Some actors who are explicitly associated with the opposition maintain control over resources and operate as intermediaries. The opportunities of BNP affiliated labour leaders for example may be limited under Awami League rule, but they are not totally excluded from controlling resources, as in the case of the *jupri* group. Indeed, there were limited examples of BNP leaders still collecting *chanda* at Osmani Uddyan park. Actors without a direct capability for violence such as the NGOs, while significantly limited in their ability to confront the interests of party political leaders, can meaningfully mediate the access that people have to security (through night shelters for example). A counterpoint to that of intermediation is the phenomenon of ‘defiled surpluses’, where people creatively avoid intermediation; suggesting that intermediation and its boundaries can be seen as a negotiated phenomenon.

The politics of intermediation is then the negotiation of access to resources, and is characterised by the capability for violence of intermediaries. This politics concerns both how people negotiate their lives within these hierarchies, but also around the violence capabilities of others. The violence capabilities actors have relate to their status within or in relation to the ruling coalition. Most fundamentally, actors can have a personal capability for direct force, but a greater capability for violence is associated with being able to rely on the capabilities of others, be it a faction or – more threatening still – the apparatus of the state. This latter ability moves the nature of power away from Lukes’ first dimension towards the third, where the implicit or explicit threat of violence influences others’ actions. This is a key advantage that actors within the ruling party have over opposition. These capabilities are thus demonstrated in diverse ways, through a show of force in a strike, a fight or a bombing for example; but also through the demonstration of an ability to mobilise others. A *samiti* can express a unity, and visiting cards or proclamations of affiliation can indicate an ability to call on more powerful actors. These arguments place significant emphasis on the necessity of violence for mobilisation, suggesting that violent mobilisation is a critical means by which groups of poor people can improve their status. People however also creatively negotiate their status around the violence capabilities of others, through associating with defiled surpluses or purposefully maintaining weak ties.

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<sup>224</sup> To be clear, this is not to argue that all forms of intermediation in Bangladeshi society are necessarily characterized by violence in the way examined, but rather that the dominant forms of intermediation in the lives of the *kangali* were, and that the framework of LAO suggests that this is prominent characteristic to wider society.

The connection between a capability for violence and intermediation conditions the terms of these relationships. It means that violence, either direct, threatened or latent, can be used to enforce the interests of these intermediaries. This suggests that the interplay between violence and intermediation should be a central characteristic to how patron-clientelism is conceptualised. That the relationships on which the *kangali* depend are often violent and exploitative is not coincidental, but a function of how social order is maintained. They are also however socially embedded. As such they are emotionally complex, and their depth cannot be captured by the exchanges described here, however important these may be. What this means in practice is that the significance of these dependencies in people's lives are always partly a function of the vagaries of people's personalities, hence accounts of particularly abusive and exploitative political leaders can be contrasted with those of helpful, protective and supportive ones. A dependency on a local political leader inspired to protect the poor by a new-age movement, compared to that of a leader known for raping vulnerable women, is extremely significant. Furthermore, seemingly contrasting characteristics can also exist simultaneously. The metaphor of 'living in the shade of others', adapted from Golap's description of relationships at Karwan Bazar, is a protective image, but one that also has resonances of shadow. The sense then is of care being balanced with that which is dark and dangerous, capturing some of the complexity described here.

#### 1.1.2. CONCEPTUALISING THE *KANGALI*

Examining the *kangali* through the politics of intermediation helps to better conceptualise this sub-group of the urban poor, and confront some of the prevalent ways in which these people are characterised in public discourse in Bangladesh. The *kangali* are by definition the destitute, those perceived as living the most degraded life in the urban context, without dignity and without hope. Associated with the worst forms of shelter or none at all, they are portrayed as floating (*bashoman*) and rootless (*chinomul*), disconnected from the social-moral base that a home village (*bari*) represents in Bangladeshi society. They are perceived as lacking the relationships and resources to improve their lives, and as debasing themselves by living in the public, open space, without even a modicum of privacy. These characterizations are not entirely inaccurate, and do in certain ways reflect the lives of the *kangali*. People behave in ways that contravene moral norms in Bangladeshi society, for example by taking drugs or having sex outside of marriage; some also are disconnected from their *bari*, driven out by family breakdown, abuse or abandonment; some are truly destitute without work or people to rely on; and finally, some (particularly adult males) do move from place to place, following networks of *mazar* (Islamic shrines), and living – at least ostensibly – more aesthetic and religiously inspired lives.

The dominant narrative emerging from this thesis is however one that radically confronts these characterisations by showing how the *kangali* are intimately connected to the social order. Relationships of intermediation permeate down to the street level, such as in the lives of market labourers, disabled beggars living on a pavement, waste workers living in a park, young thieves in a bazar, or the women sitting in the ground

selling scavenged vegetables. The terms of dependencies on labour leaders, *linemen* or political leaders - particularly around the areas of work, business and security - are structured by the dynamics to how social order is maintained. The *kangali* are used for political activities, and are a source of *chanda*; and as such, often support and reaffirm the violence capabilities of actors within the ruling coalition. The historical connections between the *kangali* and *mastan* gangs, or the *rootless people* and *goonda* in Kolkata, continue in a different form. That these relationships penetrate to the lowest hierarchical levels of urban life indicates how deeply rooted and comprehensive the dynamics maintaining social order are.

Furthermore, although outside of their *bari*, many of the *kangali* are still very much connected to their roots. For some, the *potho-bosti* (street-slums) in which they live are formed through village connections. Many more still retain clear links to their *bari*, and fund rural lives with urban money. This was the case for all of the disabled beggars I met outside the Supreme Court, for example. Though there are elements of freedom to living in such spaces, in that certain social norms are not so clearly enforced, exploiting defiled surpluses represents an intense discipline and sacrifice. It is a constructive act in that it can help enable improvements, and opportunities, in lives elsewhere. When viewed historically in relation to the significance of caste in historic Dhaka, the defiled surpluses proposition suggests an interesting historical development. It was argued that an association with that which is considered defiled, often inhibited people's potential to participate in society and structured inequalities. The account of the *kangali* developed in chapter nine suggested dynamics that turn this association on its head: an association with that which is considered defiled can in fact represent a means by which people improve their livelihoods.

Through adopting the contentious term *kangali*, there is inevitably a tension between speaking across a group of people, while recognising and exploring heterogeneity within the group described. My constant use of 'the *kangali*' should be acknowledged as simplistic, and we need to be reminded of the scavenger Masud who emphasised to me how *people aren't all the same!* This thesis has offered many ways of conceptually delineating the *kangali* through the framework of intermediation. Perhaps most fundamentally is the ways and degree to which people live in the shade of others, which is to say their distance from some of the intermediaries described. The phenomenon of living in the shade of others is however complex, and people can exist concurrently at a proximity and distance in different regards. Furthermore, as empirical chapters have suggested, there is no simple relationship between this intermediation and outcomes in the lives of the *kangali*. Proximity and distance both pose risk and opportunities, and these materialise in people's lives in different ways, influenced by diverse factors such as personalities, shocks and chance.

## 10.2. SOCIAL ORDER IN CONTEMPORARY BANGLADESH

### 1.1.3. THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF VIOLENCE

Bangladesh was recently conceptualised as a ‘vulnerable semi-mature LAO’ (Khan 2013). Even in the short period between Khan’s analysis, the research for this thesis, and writing this now, much seems to have changed. This section reflects on Bangladesh’s recent political transition through events described in this thesis, but does so through understanding it in relation to previous changes in the country’s political settlement from the late 1980s. Through these periods a thread can be discerned: the ever-closer association between violence, the ruling coalition and party politics.

The backdrop to this research is a transition in the structure of the ruling coalition during the late 1980s under President Ershad. Khan (2010a) describes the need for Ershad to appeal to wider groups within society to consolidate and maintain his dominant capability for violence. The lack of research and sources from this period necessitates a degree of conjecture, however at Karwan Bazar this period is associated with increased political participation at the grassroots and also large gangs, dominated by powerful and infamous leaders. With the return to parliamentary democracy in 1991 and the fierce conflict for power that ensued, both political parties and these gangsters grew in strength. Gangsters were associated in public imagination through a host of terms both old and new to Bangladesh, including *mastan*, *shontrash*, *goonda*, “*top terror*”, “*mafia*” and “*godfather*”. These gangsters operated as powerful intermediaries, particularly in the lives of the poor. They began to be mentioned in academic work through the 1990s, were often discussed in the media, and almost mythologized in public imagination, as seen in films from that period. Though politically sheltered, many gangsters retained a degree of independence from party politics, and could shift with the political currents; and hence the same figure could function under different regimes such as the Jatiyo Dal, BNP or Awami League.

Alongside political relationships, these gangsters had complex relationships to the state, and were often pursued and arrested by the police. *Picchi Hannan* for example rose to power through meeting Sweden Aslam in prison, and later had to move from safe house to safe house to evade capture, while his gang ruled his territory. These gangsters had a significant capability for violence, for which they were feared and infamous, however many were unable to draw significantly upon the support of the police or apparatus of the state. They could not truly develop power in Lukes’ third dimension and as such other groups could always form to challenge their capability for violence, which is why the period was associated with significant violence as gangs openly fought for dominance.

From the early 2000s, Dhaka however saw significant change. With Operation Clean Heart and later the formation of RAB, the state violently pursued these gangsters, first killing *Picchi Hannan* and then many more in “*crossfire*”. Most infamous gangsters were either killed, imprisoned, fled to India, or managed to move into politics or



business. In Dhaka some gangs do still exist, but only in a diminished form. The destruction of these gangs did not however result in a discontinuation of many of the roles associated with them, such as collecting *chanda*, running illegal businesses or mobilising people towards political violence. Indeed, the formation of RAB and increased capability for violence of the state, enabled bodies within or associated with political parties, to take over these roles. These bodies thus have a greater capability for violence than *mastan* gangs in that they are able to draw upon the strength of the state, threaten arrest, police cases and imprisonment. Political parties have what was often described by the *kangali* and key informants as an *agreement* with the police. *Chanda* is funnelled through *linemen* into the police and the police can be relied upon to protect the ruling party, utilising the wider systems of law enforcement such as the courts where and when necessary. These politically affiliated actors thus have a far greater capability for violence, which increases their power in Lukes' third dimension, the ability to influence preferences. The consolidation of power in the hands of the ruling political party has increased an underlying latent or implicit violence within society that conditions what is or is not possible. This may offer one explanation for why the levels of physical violence have decreased so markedly in the lives of the *kangali* and the wider research contexts. Although Dhaka city experiences far fewer incidents of physical violence, order is premised on a profound underlying violence.

The uneasy peace that this consolidation of violence capabilities has created, has enabled a degree of political stability, which has been further consolidated after the landslide election victory in January 2014 (landslide only because the BNP refused to participate). During the research, the BNP's status as a serious opposition party became more and more precarious, such that by the time research had finished, they were unable to mount a serious presence on the streets to demonstrate their strength. Attempts to do so – like those I observed in Dhaka in 2014-2015 – were quickly overwhelmed by the Awami League and clamped down on by the police. On days the BNP or Jamaat-e-Islami did call *hartal* during this period, key intersections and areas in Dhaka were busy with political activists, but those of the Awami League. The attempts of the *jupri* group to mobilise initially alongside BNP muscle, and then in support of the BNP through bombings, illustrate in microcosm the consequences of overtly supporting the opposition party. Parvez had his hands and feet smashed by RAB while tied down to a rickshaw van, and Azad and Rubel were still, when I left fieldwork, in Dhaka Central Jail. If the story at Karwan Bazar resembles elsewhere, then the ability of the BNP to even organise a simple bombing has also been largely controlled.

The story from Dhaka over recent decades is then the consolidation of a capability for violence within party political structures, on the back of the state, and now more recently the consolidation of violence capabilities in one particular party, the Awami League. This all seems to indicate the re-emergence of the authoritarianism of Bangladeshi politics prior to 1991 (Khan 2010a). Understood within the LAO framework, the significance of this for Bangladesh's future are ambiguous. A key

‘doorstep condition’, necessary for a transition to an OAO, is the consolidated control of the military. Applied to Bangladesh where a capability for violence is maintained by a wider set of actors than the army and police (for example political parties, labour factions, and historically gangsters), the transition described seems to represent the consolidation of violence capabilities within a particular institution, namely political parties, however still dispersed throughout society. In other words, though the organisational forms through which violence can be organised are more limited, these are still controlled at different levels of society and have not been consolidated by a central state. This analysis of recent decades of political transition sets the stage for further reflection on Bangladesh, its future, and further research.

#### 1.1.4. FUTURE RESEARCH AND CHANGE IN BANGLADESH

A premise of the model of social order on which this thesis has reflected and built, is that there is no teleology moving societies through different stages of development (North et al 2009). Whether the changes observed in the research contexts and described above in terms of the institutionalization of violence, represent a movement towards the OAO model is debatable. Furthermore, there are no guarantees of where Bangladeshi society will move from here. Bangladesh could move into a period of political stability under a one-party state bolstered by strong economic growth, fracture into forms of organised violence both familiar and unknown, or move in ways yet unclear. It is on this basis that we can consider how this model of social order informs our understanding of Bangladesh’s future, and the areas for further research that emerge from this.

The central problematic emerging from this thesis concerns how the capability for violence is organised, and the significance of this for maintaining social order. In light of the transitions described above a fundamental question for understanding Bangladesh’s future is the dynamics of social order that this authoritarianism gives birth to, and whether the current government will be able to maintain their grip on power under these conditions. The concentration of a capability for violence within the ruling party is often flagrantly exhibited; for example through brandishing weapons at protests, public humiliations, targeted beatings and killings. The abuse and violence that ruling party actors can mete out on others can however relatively easily become the focus of significant domestic (and even international) media attention. This is particularly so given the widespread use of social media, and the ability for videos and photos to ‘go viral’. These events can seriously undermine the perceived legitimacy of the ruling party by the public. Whether a serious public backlash could form against a loss of the government’s moral standing is unknown, however events such as Shahbagh<sup>225</sup> do suggest a degree of unpredictability in the forms of mobilisation possible in Bangladesh. It is perhaps in light of this unknown that when particular incidents of abuse have garnered significant media attention, these have

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<sup>225</sup> The 2013 protests at Shahbagh junction north of Dhaka University against a verdict of life imprisonment for a war criminal in the 1971 war of independence, and in favour of the death penalty.

usually been met with direct comment and action from either the Prime Minister herself, or at a Ministerial level. The Prime Minister has made very public declarations that Awami League bodies will be held accountable for their crimes, and the courts have – in highly visible instances – followed through these actions, even when it has meant imprisoning relatively senior political leaders. This raises the difficult question of how the apparent ‘excesses’ of political leaders can be controlled, when these ‘excesses’ can represent the process of maintaining power, and accruing resources, on which social order rests.

Under ‘authoritarian clientelism’ swathes of political operators at different levels of society have been cut from the resources that they would have expected to control since early 2014. Though violence specialists by training the extent to which they can mobilise significant forces on the streets is clearly highly limited. What has become and will become of these violence specialists remains to be studied and seen. One possibility is that they calculate that their political careers are over, at least for now, and focus on non-political activities. Another option is that some use their capability for violence but mobilise in new or different ways. Questions have been raised about the extent to which Islamic extremists will benefit from this, although there is not convincing evidence of this connection. A further possibility is that they become incorporated in some capacity within the dominant coalition. Indeed, this was the experience of Parvez at Karwan Bazar, the BNP activist orchestrating bombings who became a RAB informer. Placating the violence capabilities of political organisers and factions across society is premised on having the resources to do so. This raises a second critical area for Bangladesh’s future, whether the resource base on which social order is maintained will remain sufficient. Economic growth has been strong despite political upheaval and terrorist attacks, but whether it will remain so cannot be predicted. This balance will furthermore remain vulnerable to yet unknown external factors be they environmental, geopolitical or economic.

The sense of unpredictability in Bangladesh’s political settlement reflects the non-teleological nature of social order, the rapidly changing political landscape, but also our lack of understanding about how social order is constituted and maintained. The recent wave of micro political economy analyses has given insight into the environment in which the urban poor live, and this thesis has further demonstrated how much more there is to understand. If our analytical concern is to understand how order is constituted, then empirically we must focus attention on how violence is organised. In the urban context this requires engaging in new ways with key actors, both familiar and new. There is, for example, little institutional analysis of the political parties, of the police, or other security forces and Dhaka city corporation. There is little sense of the complexity within these institutions, for example the webs *former*, *linemen* and *chamcha*, of the negotiations and balance between and within them. Further research within this field is therefore critical and can take many forms.

Moving beyond the contextualised case study of *Picchi Hannan*, further investigation into the political economy of the transition argued for could help nuance the argument

made, demonstrating how these gangsters have fallen, where they have evolved, and the comparative impact that direct dominance by the political parties has had. Institutional analyses of the Awami League or police, and the relationships between them, could be approached in a multitude of ways. It could, for example, be through understanding a particular sector, further ethnographic research in a particular area but with greater focus on these institutions, or be more actor-oriented, understanding how individuals navigate and pursue their careers within these. It could also take a particular case, for example the interesting conflict between elected officials, Dhaka North and South City mayors, and hawkers and transport workers, which has played over the past couple of years. As the ruling party's authoritarian control is consolidated, there may even be a new emerging power balance between the apparatus of the state (the police and RAB for example) and the ruling party, as the government calculates how it can most efficiently maintain power and social order.

A final and pressing question, to return to the focus of this thesis, is the fate of the poor. What will this authoritarianism bring for the *kangali* in their attempts to improve their lives? How these macro shifts in the structure and form of a ruling coalition will be felt at the grassroots, remains an open question. The last transition described from *mastan* gangs to closer party political control led to a significant decline in physical violence, such that the *kangali* describe their security as far improved today. How a decline in party political competition will change the dynamics of intermediation is likely to be complex. Shifting time horizons and incentives may influence the bonds created and necessitated, posing new opportunities, risks and challenges. Factional or the re-emergence of party political conflict will likely further call on the *kangali* as a source of *chanda* and violence capabilities. The potential for defiled surpluses may decline if intermediation imposes itself, economic growth slows or violence erupts. What is clear is that negotiating the shade of others will remain central to the lives of the *kangali*, and the dynamics to this must be further understood as Bangladesh moves in uncertain ways.

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